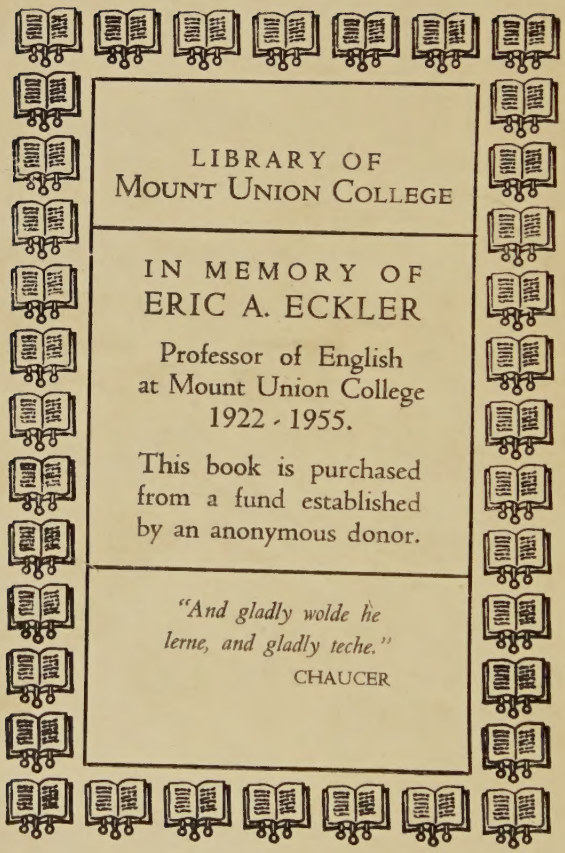



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"And gladly wolde he
lerne, and gladly teche."
CHAUCER

created

VOLUME III

MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS

THE COLLECTED ESSAYS AND PAPERS OF GEORGE SAINTSBURY 1875–1920

VOLUME III



1923

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PREFACE

If the old reproach of *crambe repetita* be to some extent valid against the two preceding volumes, it is so against this to a much less. Nearly two-thirds of its contents have never before been collected; and two of the papers—those on *Spelling Reform* and on *The Permanent and the Temporary in Literature*—both of which I hope may have some interest—have never been printed till now. The "miscellaneous"-ness of the contents may seem exaggerated; but is quite deliberate. I am sure Dr Johnson himself would have admitted that Literature, Politics, and Cookery form an excellent leash of interests.

With regard to the "Historical Novel" essays I should like to acknowledge, not out of vanity but with due gratitude, the fact that Professor Firth quoted them recently with distinct approval. His Majesty's Navy has not always thus treated privateers.

For original and other dates of appearance, &c., see General Preface, Vol. I. But I can now give that of *The Permanent and the Temporary in Literature* as October 1910.

G. S.

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MISCELLANEOUS ESSAYS

I

THE HISTORICAL NOVEL

I. THE DAYS OF IGNORANCE

Who wrote the first Historical Novel? The orthodox, and perhaps on the whole the sufficient, answer to this question is, Xenophon. And indeed the *Cyropædia* does in many ways answer to the description of a historical novel better than anything, at least anything extant, before it, and as well as most things for more than two thousand years after it. It is true that even nowadays hardly the most abandoned devotee of the instructive in novels, would begin a book with such a sentence as, "It occurred to us once upon a time how many democracies have come to an end at the hands of those who wished to have some kind of constitution other than a democracy." But perhaps that is only because we are profoundly immoral and sophisticated, while the Greeks were straightforward and sincere. For the very novelist who artfully begins with a scrap of dialogue, or a description of somebody looking over a gate, or a pistol shot, or a sunset, or a tea-party, will, before many pages are turned, plunge you fathoms deeper than ever classical plummet can have sounded in disquisition and dulness. Still, there is no doubt that not merely on this earliest, but on every early example of the kind, there weighed a certain character of amateurishness and novitiate. Not till within the nineteenth century in the hands of Miss Austen and Scott did prose fiction of any kind

shake itself entirely free from the trammels of secondary purpose, without at the same time resigning itself to the mere concoction of amusing or exciting adventure. Even Fielding, though he would let nothing interfere with his story, thought it desirable to interlard and accompany that story with moral and philosophical disquisitions.

It is not therefore wonderful that Xenophon, who was quite a different person from Fielding, and was moreover simply exploring an untried way, should have subordinated his novel to his political purpose. In fact it is perhaps rather excessive to regard him as having intentionally written a novel, in our sense, at all. He wanted to write a political treatise: he was a pupil of Socrates; and vastly as the Socrates of Plato and the Socrates of Xenophon differ, they agree in exhibiting a strong predilection for the use of fictitious, or semi-fictitious literary machinery for the conveyance of philosophical truth. The *Cyropædia* is in fact a sort of *Emile* of antiquity, devoted to the education of a king instead of a private person. It may even be argued that such romantic elements as it does contain (the character, or at least personage, of Panthea, the rivalry of Araspes and Abradatas, and so forth) are introduced less for any attraction they may give to the story than for the opportunities they afford to Cyrus of displaying the proper conduct of the ruler. And it is scarcely necessary to say that the actual historical element in the book is very small indeed, scarcely extending beyond the parentage, personality, and general circumstances of Cyrus.

Such as the book is, however, it is the nearest approach to the kind that we have from classical times. Some indeed would have it that Quintus Curtius has taken nearly as great liberties with the destroyer as

Xenophon did with the founder of the Persian monarchy: but the things obviously belong to different kinds. The *Cyropædia* is a philosophical romance for which its author has chosen to borrow a historic name or two; the other (if indeed its author was a real classical writer and not a mere re-arranger of mediæval fable) is a history which admits unhistorical and romantic details. Nor can any of the extant Greek Romances, as they are generally called, be said to possess a historical complexion. They may sometimes, for the convenience of the authors, allude more or less slightly to historical facts; but their general story and their characters have nothing to do with anything of the kind. The remarkable adventures of the conventional pair of lovers need no such admixture; and Anthea, Chariclea, Leucippe, Chloe, and Hysmine are won and lost and won again without any but glances (if even that) at historical characters or incidents. Some things in Lucian's *True History* and other burlesques have led to the idea that the Historical Novel may have been more fully represented in works that have perished; but there is little evidence of this.

It does not require very long or elaborate reflection to show that things could not well have been different. The attraction of historical subjects in fiction, for the writer to some extent and still more for the reader, depends entirely upon the existence of a considerable body of written history, and on the public acquaintance with it. Now although erudite enquiry has sufficiently shown that the ancients were by no means so badly off for books as it pleased Dr Johnson and others to assume, it is perfectly certain that they cannot possibly have had such a body of history. Except some scraps of chiefly Persian chronicle and a certain knowledge of affairs in Egypt, the Greeks had no

history but their own, and this latter they were making and writing, not reading. They left the Romans a little more but not much. There was thus little for a Roman, and next to nothing for a Greek Scott or Dumas to go upon even had he existed; no materials to work up, no public taste, imagination, or traditions to appeal to. Even if instincts and desires of the kind did suggest themselves to any one, the natural region in which it was sought to gratify them was mythology, not history, while the natural medium was verse, not prose. Apuleius, who worked up the legend of Cupid and Psyche so charmingly, might no doubt, if it had occurred to him, have done something of the same kind with Appius and Virginia, with the expulsion of the Pisistratidæ, with a hundred other Greek and Roman incidents of romantic capabilities. He would have had, too, the immense advantage of being (modern as he was in a way) on the right side of the gulf, of being, as our jargon has it, more or less "in touch" with his subjects, and of being free from the laborious and yet ineffectual gropings which have marred all post-mediæval attempts at the Historical Novel with a classical theme. But he did not; and if he did not there was certainly no one else who was likely to do it. The Historical Novel of Greece is we have seen a philosophical treatise; the Historical Novel of Rome is an epic, an epic differing in merit as *Æneid* from *Thebaid* and *Thebaid* from *Bellum Punicum*, but still alike in being an epic, and not a novel.

When the kind revives after the deluge of the barbarians it shows us one of the most curious and interesting evidences of the strange fertilising power of that deluge. The very identical separation which in some five centuries dissolves and precipitates Latin into Romance, begets the romance itself at the same

time. No doubt the new historical novels at first seem to be epics, like their predecessors, in so far as they had any. They are first in verse; but before very long they are in prose also. And what is more, one of the most essential and formative characteristics of the Historical Novel appears in them. The Virgils and their followers had gone a thousand years back for their subjects; even Silius Italicus had selected his at a prudent distance of hundreds. But the epics (before very long to become prose romances) of the Carlovingian and Arthurian cycles attack comparatively recent times; and when the Crusades begin, by one of the most interesting things in literature, contemporary event actually transforms itself into romance. The story of fact seems to become alive, to twist itself out of the hands of the chronicler who has actually seen the fearsome host of the Tafurs before Antioch, and ridden "red-wetshod" into Jerusalem. Moreover it takes to itself all manner of strange legendary accretions, and becomes (as in *Les Chétifs* and other parts of the Crusading cycle) a historical novel, with some personages and incidents strictly matter-of-fact, and others purely and obviously fictitious.

There is no more difficult question than that of deciding in exactly what manner these Romances were received by our forefathers. These forefathers were (a dim consciousness of it appears to be at last dawning on their descendants) not by any means fools; though the belief that they were so may still survive in company with the kindred beliefs that they never took baths, that they were extremely miserable, and so forth. They knew perfectly well that these things were, as they said themselves, *trovés*, invented, sometimes by the very person who sang or said them, always by somebody like him. At the same time they knew that

there was a certain amount of historic truth about some of the personages. Probably (the gods not having made them critical about things where criticism could well be spared) they took in the thing pretty much the same delight that the modern reader takes in the mixture of truth and fiction which distinguishes the Historical Novel itself, and did not care to separate the constituents thereof.

It would take far too much space, and would be less strictly appropriate to a handling of the Historical Novel than to one of the Romance generally, to sort out in any detail the different kinds of mediæval story and their exact relation to our particular kind. And the investigation would be a little perplexed by the incurable mediæval habit of putting everything in verse, science as well as fiction, imagination as well as history. Perhaps the nearest approach to the Historical Novel proper is to be found in the Icelandic Sagas, where the best authorities seem to agree that simple and sober family and provincial history is tricked out in the most inextricable and bewildering manner with sheer Scaldic invention. But the explanation is, as I have already hinted, that criticism was not born or reborn. Some, I believe, would be well pleased if it never had been; but that is neither here nor there. Has not Professor Flint, the most learned and painstaking of investigators, told us that he can find no trace of systematic historical criticism before Ibn Khaldun, that erudite Arab and contemporary of Chaucer? Now as without a considerable stock of history and some general knowledge of it there is no material for the Historical Novel, so without a more or less distinct criticism of history, of what pretty certainly has happened as distinguished from what very certainly has not, it is impossible for this

kind of novel to attain a distinct and separate existence.

And you never (or at any rate very seldom) can put your finger on any part of any mediæval history, in prose or verse, whether it be avowedly chronicle or half-avowedly fiction, and say, "Here the man consciously and deliberately left his facts and took to his fictions." The difficulty, the impossibility, as it seems to me, of satisfactorily tracing the origins of the Arthurian story lies precisely in this. Your Nennius, your Caradoc of Lancarvan even, very possibly, nay most probably, believed that they were giving simple history. Perhaps your Archdeacon Walter (always supposing that he ever existed) did the same. But what are we to make of Geoffrey of Monmouth and persons like him? Was Geoffrey a merely uncritical chronicler, taking details from record and romance alike? Was he, whether plagiarist in the main, or plastic artist in the main, a "maker," a conscious inventor? Or was he a historical novelist before his time, taking his facts from Nennius and Walter (if Walter there was), his inventions partly from Welsh and Breton poetry, partly from his own brains, and weaving it all into something like a whole? That is exactly what no one can say.

But I cling to my own contention that it is impossible to find out how much in the average mediæval writer was intended history, and how much deliberate romance, for the precise reason that he had never as a rule bent his mind to consider the difference between them. "The French book" said it, or the Latin book, or something, anything, else; and he took the saying, comparatively indifferent to its source, and handed it on a little increased, or at any rate not diminished, like the thrifty personage at the beginning of the *Republic*.

It will therefore be clear that, so long as this attitude of mind prevailed, no Historical Novel in the proper sense of the term was possible. History and Romance passed into each other with too bewildering a metamorphosis; what is pedantically called "the respect of the document" was a thing absolutely unknown. In the days when the Homeric tale of Troy expanded itself through Dictys and Dares, through Benoît de Sainte-More and Guido Colonna, into endless amplifications; when the already rather romantic Alexander of Curtius (always supposing the order not to be the reverse one) acquired twelve Paladins, and discovered the Fountain of Youth, and all but achieved the Earthly Paradise; when the merely poetical history of the *Chanson d'Antioche* branched off into the sheer legend of *Les Chétifs* and the endless imaginations of the *Chevalier au Cygne*, there could be no special Historical Novel because everything was at once novel and history. The peculiarities of romantic handling had become ingrained in, were as it were inextricably blended with and joined to, the literary forms in common use. Not merely a superhuman genius like Dante, when he throws contemporary event and feeling into a form which seems to belong to all time or none, but lesser and more strictly practical persons like Froissart and Guillaume de Machault, when the one tells the contemporary prowess of the English in France in brilliant prose, and the other sings the contemporary exploits of Peter of Lusignan at Alexandria in not very ornate verse, share in the benefits or the drawbacks of this romantic atmosphere. Without any scuffling they change rapiers; and you cannot tell which is which.

A kind which the restless ingenuity and fertile invention of the Middle Ages had not discovered was very unlikely to find existence in the dulness of the

fifteenth century. That age, so far as intellectual work is concerned, was occupied either in tedious imitation of the products of mediæval genius, or in laborious exhumation of the products of the genius of the ancients. To history proper it did not pay very much attention, and its chief achievement in fiction, the *Amadis* cycle, is mainly remarkable for the way in which it cuts itself altogether adrift from history. The older romances, in conformity with the stock tag of one of their writers about "the sayings and the doings and the ways of the ancestors," tried to bring themselves from time to time into a sort of contact with those central and accepted points of older romance which were almost history. But Lobeira, or Montalvo, or whoever he was, with his or their followers, hardly do this at all. Their world of fantasy suffices them. And perhaps, if anybody likes critical paradox, they may be said to have in a way accelerated the real Historical Novel by rejecting, half unconsciously no doubt, the admixture of novel and history in the undistinguished and indistinguishable fashion of the Middle Ages.

The sixteenth century was too busy with the actual, and (in that which was not actual) with its marvellous outburst of poetry and drama, with its passionate devotion to religious, political, philosophical and other learning to pay much attention to the comparatively frivolous department of prose fiction. Even if it had done so, the old constraints and disabilities waited on it still. It was, however, getting rid of them pretty rapidly. It was accumulating a great mass of historical information which the Press was spreading and making generally accessible; it was gradually forging and exercising itself with the weapons of criticism; and side by side with this exercise, it was developing the natural corrective and supplement—an intelligent and affec-

tionate retrospect of the past from the literary point of view. This last is a thing of which we find little trace either in classical or in mediæval times: the most obvious ancient indications of it are to be found in Alexandria, that microcosm in advance of the modern world, and especially in the writings of the Hellenistic Jews. But it begins to appear or reappear in the sixteenth century, and with it comes the promise of the Historical Novel.

The promise, but not the performance. Among the scanty fiction of the sixteenth century the work of Rabelais and Cervantes (for though *Don Quixote* did not appear till a year or two after the century had arithmetically closed, it belongs thereto) towers with a supremacy not merely born of the want of rivals. But each is (so far as class goes) only a parody of the older, and especially of the *Amadis*, romances. The philosophical fictions, whether they be political like *Utopia* or social and educational like *Euphues*, are equally far from our subject, and obviously do but copy the forms of Plato and Xenophon. Nearly all the rest is but tale-telling, with an imitation of the Greek pastoral here and there, blended with other kinds, as in *Arcadia* and *Astræa* and *Diana*.

The immediate descendants of these latter did indeed in the next age attempt to give themselves historical form, or at any rate historical names; and the names if not the form prevailed for a considerable period. Indeed, *Le Grand Cyrus* and *Cléopâtre* and *Clélie*, if we take their glances at the present, as well as their nominal references to the past, are doubly historical; and this double appeal continued in the ordinary French novel for a long time. Thus the characters of the famous *Princesse de Clèves* (the first modern novel as some will have it to be) were all real persons, or most of them,

once upon a time, besides possessing real doubles in the court of Louis the Fourteenth. But it was in the latter, not in the former bearing of them that their original readers took interest, while the writers here and elsewhere cared not in the very least for any historical verisimilitude whatever. And this continued to be the case throughout the eighteenth century. The Novel of Sensibility, either out of mere habit or for some other reason, was rather fond of taking historical names and even in a very broad and general way historical incidents to help it; but nothing could be less like a Historical Novel.

In England, as is very well known, the seventeenth century gave us, properly speaking, neither novel nor romance of the slightest importance. It allegorised; and on one occasion its allegory shot up into the mighty creation of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. It pursued its explorations in fictitious political geography from *Utopia* to *Atlantis* and from *Atlantis* to *Oceana*. It told a story or so as the humour took it. But it was not till the next century that the country which has since been the school of every kind of novel to every other country in Europe, and has in the past hundred and fifty years probably produced more novels than all the countries of Europe put together, began seriously to devote itself to the kind. And even then it did not for a long time discover the real Historical Novel. Defoe, indeed, hovered around and about this kind as he did around and about so many others. The *Memoirs of a Cavalier* is a Historical Novel almost full-fledged, and wanting only a stronger dramatic and personal element in it. That unequal and puzzling book *Roxana* is almost another: and if the *Memoirs of Captain Carleton* are fiction, they may perhaps take rank with these, though at a greater distance. But either Defoe's own incurable

tendencies to mystification, or the appetites of the time, seem to have imposed upon him the need of pretending that everything which he wrote was true. Nor did he ever attain to that important variety of the novelist's art which consists in detaching and isolating the minor characters of his book,—an art which is nowhere of more consequence than in the Historical Novel. If Roxana's Amy, and William the Quaker in *Captain Singleton* stand out among his characters, it is because by art or accident he has been able to impart more of this detachment and individuality to them than to almost any others. And as we shall see when we come presently to consider what the Historical Novel ought to be, there is hardly any qualification so necessary to it as this.

But Defoe, as is well known, exercised little direct influence on English literature, for all his genius, his immense industry, and the multifarious ways in which he was a precursor and innovator. He was read, rather than imitated or critically admired; and even if his influence had been more direct, another current would have probably been strong enough to drive back or absorb the waves of his for a time. Le Sage with *Gil Blas* taking up and enforcing the previous popularity of *Don Quixote*; Marivaux with his lessons to Richardson; and the strong satiric allegory of Swift, slightly sweetened and humanised but not much weakened by Fielding, still held the Historical Novel aloof, still kept it "a bodiless childful of life in the gloom." And part of the cause was still, unless I greatly mistake, that which has been already assigned, the absence of a distinct, full, and tolerably critical notion of history such as the eighteenth century itself was hard at work supplying.

Nor was the mere accumulation of historical facts,

or the mere diffusion of knowledge of them, the only work of preparation for this special purpose in which the century was engaged; though it was the greatest. Few people, I think, quite realise how little history was read and known in England before the middle of the eighteenth century. It was then that Johnson could mention Knollys (a very good and interesting writer no doubt, but already antiquated and certainly not of the first class) as our best if not our only historian on the great scale. And it was only then that Hume and Robertson and Gibbon by ushering the Historic Muse in full dress into libraries, and Goldsmith by presenting her in rather careless but very agreeable undress in schoolrooms, were at once taking away this reproach and spreading the knowledge of the subject; in other words were providing the historical novel-writer with material, and furnishing the historical novel-reader with the appetite and the modicum of knowledge necessary for its enjoyment. Yet it may be doubted whether this would have sufficed alone, or without that special additional stimulus which was given by what is vaguely called the Romantic movement. When in their very different ways Percy and Walpole and Gray, with many others, directed or excited public curiosity about the incidents, the manners, and the literature of former times, they made the Historical Novel inevitable; and indeed it began to show itself with very little delay.

Want of practice, want of the aforesaid historical knowledge, and perhaps, above all, want of a genius who chose to devote himself to the special subject, made the earliest babblings of the style very childish babblings indeed. *The Castle of Otranto* itself is in essence a Historical Novel with the history omitted; and a good many of its imitators endeavoured to supply

the want. For a time they did it with astonishing clumsiness and want of the historic sense. Even Godwin, a historian by profession and a man of really very considerable historical knowledge, appears to have had not the remotest notion of local colour, of antiquarian fitness, of the adjustment of atmosphere and style. *St Leon*, for instance, is in its opening scenes to no small extent historical, and keeps up the historic connection to some degree throughout; but, except for a few bare facts, the whole thing is a gross anachronism, only to be excused on the inadequate ground that in "a romance of immortality" you cannot expect much attention to miserable concerns of time. There is not the least attempt to adjust the manners to those of Francis the First's day, or the dialogue and general incidents to anything known of the sixteenth century. The age still told its novels, as it mounted its plays, with a bland and complete disregard of details such as these.

And Godwin was a purist and a pedant in these respects as compared with the great Anne Radcliffe. The rare lapse into older carelessness which made the sun set in the sea on the east coast of Scotland in *The Antiquary* is a peccadillo not to be named beside the astounding geography of the *Mysteries of Udolpho*, or the wonderful glimpses of a France such as the gifted lady imagined it to have been in the time of the religious wars. Clara Reeve, the author of the once famous *Old English Baron*, writing years before either Godwin or Mrs Radcliffe, and on the direct and acknowledged model of Walpole, threw the lessons of her master (who really did know something both about mediæval history and manners,) entirely to the winds; and though she took Henry the Sixth's youth and the regency of Bedford for her time, made her picture one of no time at all. Her French contemporaries were doing just the

same or worse; and all over Europe the return to the Middle Ages was being made to a Middle Age entirely, or almost entirely of convention. Miss Reeve herself found not a few imitators who were more boldly but not more wisely historical than herself. In the ninth decade of the eighteenth century when Scott was a boy of twelve or fourteen, Miss Lee had produced her egregious *Recess*, dealing with Elizabethan times and Elizabeth herself. Many others followed, and the not entirely forgotten novels of Jane Porter, though they will be noticed later, actually preceded Scott.

If we could attach quite as much importance to Scott's intromissions with *Queenhoo Hall* (1808) as he himself seems to do in regard to the genesis of *Waverley*, the performances of the Reeves and the Radcliffes might be credited with a very large share in determining the birth, at last, of the genuine Historical Novel proper. For there can be no doubt that it was because he was shocked at the liberties taken and the ignorance shown in these works, that that eminent and excellent antiquary, Mr Joseph Strutt, determined to show the public how their ancestors really did live and move and have their being, in the romance of *Queenhoo Hall*. I am ashamed to say that my knowledge of that work is entirely confined to Scott's own fragment, for the book is a very rare one; at least I hardly ever remember having seen a copy catalogued. But the account of it which Scott himself gives, and the fragment which he seems to have very dutifully copied in manner from the original, are just what we should expect. Strutt —probably caring nothing for a story as a story and certainly being unable to write one—busied himself only about making his language and his properties and his general arrangement as archaically correct as possible. His book therefore naturally bore the same

resemblance to a Historical Novel that Mr Oldbuck's *Caledoniad*, could he ever have got it done according to his own notions and without Lovel's assistance, would have borne to an epic poem.

And now, as we have brought the Historical Novel safely through that period of ante-natal history which some great authorities have thought the most important of all, as we have finished the account of the Days of Ignorance (to adopt the picturesque and pleasing Arab expression for the period of Arabian annals before Mahomet), it would be obviously improper to bring in the Prophet himself at the end of even a short preliminary enquiry. And there is all the more reason for not doing so because this is the place in which to consider what the Historical Novel is. It will not do to adopt the system of the bold empiric and say, "the Novel as written by Scott." For some of the best of Scott's novels (including *Guy Mannering* and *The Antiquary*) are not historical novels at all. Yet it may be confessed that Scott left but little in a general way to be found out about the style, and that his practice, according as it is less or more successful, may almost be translated into the principles of the art.

We have already seen something of what a Historical Novel ought not to be and is not; while the hundred years which have passed since the publication of *Waverley*, if they have not shown us all possible forms of what it ought to be and is, have probably gone very far to do so. For the possibilities of art, though quite infinite in the way of detail, by no means include very many new things in their general outlines; and when an apparently new leaf is turned, the lines on that leaf are apt to be filled in pretty quickly. Periclean and Elizabethan drama each showed all it could do in less than the compass of a lifetime, though no doubt good

examples were produced over a much longer period than this. And though I hope that good historical novels will be written for hundreds of years to come, I do not think that they will be written on any very different principles than those which showed themselves in the novels produced during the forty years which passed between the appearance of *Waverley* and the appearance of *Westward Ho!*

We have seen how the advent of the Historical Novel was delayed by the want of a general knowledge of history, and we have seen how in that fate of *Queenhoo Hall*, whereof Scott himself is the chronicler, the opposite danger appeared when the first had been removed. The danger of too much history lay not merely in the way of too much pedantry like that of the good Strutt, but in that of an encroachment of the historic on the romantic element in divers ways. This, if not so destructive of the very existence of the thing as the other danger, is the more fatal of the two to its goodness when it does exist.

The commonest and most obvious form of this error is decanting too much of your history bodily into your novel. Scott never falls into this error; it is much if he once or twice approaches it very far off. But Dumas, in the days when he let "the young men" do the work with too little revision or warning, was prone to it; G. P. R. James often fell into it; and Harrison Ainsworth, in those painful later years when his dotages fell into the reluctant hands of critics who had rejoiced in him earlier as readers, was simply steeped in it. It made not merely the besetting sin, but what may be called the regular practice (unconscious of sin at all) of writers like Southey's friend, Mrs Bray; and the unwary beginner has not shaken himself or herself free from it even now.

This, however, is so gross and palpable a fault that one could but wonder at its deceiving persons of ability and literary virtue, if the temptations to it were not equally palpable and gross. A much subtler, though perhaps an even worse mistake, comes next, and ruins books that might have been good and very good to this day, though Scott himself, besides the warning of his practice, marked it "dangerous" in more than one place of his critical introductions, and though all the better critics from Joubert and Sainte-Beuve downwards have blown their foghorns and rocked their bell-buoys for its avoidance. This is the allotting too prominent a position and too dominant an interest to the real persons and the real incidents of the story. It is, I suppose, in vain to repeat the aforesaid warnings. Just before giving up novel-reviewing I can remember two books—both written with extreme care by persons of no ordinary talent, and one of them at least introducing personages and a story of the most poignant interest—which were failures because the historical attraction was not relegated to the second place. If Scott himself had made Mary the actual heroine of *The Abbot*, had raised George Douglas to the position of hero, and had made their loves (practically fictitious as they would have been) the central point of the story, I do not doubt that he would have failed. If it be urged, that he has made Richard almost the avowed hero of *The Talisman* and not much less than the hero of *Ivanhoe*, the answer is clear: that the story is in the one case almost entirely, in the other everywhere, save in a very few points, removed from actual history, and that while we gain the popular interest in the Lion-Heart as a stimulus, we are not in reality balked and hampered by the too narrow room, the too inelastic circumstances, which historic fact supplies. I have

always thought it a proof of the unerring tact which guided Sir Walter in general on this matter that he never once, save in the case of *Rob Roy* (and there the reality was but a little one), took his title from a real person, and only twice in the suggestive, but not hampering instances of *Kenilworth* and *Woodstock*, from a real place. For *The Legend of Montrose* and *The Fair Maid of Perth* contain obvious fiction as their main appeal. His successors were less wise; and they paid for their want of wisdom.

The canons negative and affirmative will then run somewhat thus: "Observe local colour and historical propriety, but do not become a slave either to Dryasdust or to Heavysterne. Intermix historic interest and the charm of well-known figures, but do not incur the danger of mere historical transcription; still more take care that the prevailing ideas of your characters, or your scene, or your action, or all three, be fantastic and within your own discretion." When these are put together we shall have what is vernacularly called "the bones" of the Historical Novel. Hereafter we may go on to see what flesh has been imposed on this skeleton by nearly three generations of practitioners. For the present it may suffice to add that the Historical Novel —like all other novels without exception, if it is to be good—must not have a direct purpose of any sort, though no doubt it may, and even generally does, enforce certain morals both historical and ethical. It is, fortunately, by its very form and postulates, freed from the danger of meddling with contemporary problems; it is grandly and artistically unactual, though here again it may teach unobtrusive lessons. Although, oddly enough, those imperfect French examples of it to which we have referred incline more to the novel than to the romance, and busy themselves with a kind

of analysis, it is of course in its nature synthetic and not analytic. It is not in the least limited by considerations of time or country; it is as much at home on a Mexican teocalli as in an English castle, though it certainly has, hitherto, exhibited the odd peculiarity that no one has written a first-rate historical novel of classical times. While enquiry and research maim the chances of art in many, perhaps in most directions, they only multiply and enlarge the fields for this. In the drudgeries of the very dullest dog that ever edited a document there may be the germ of a *Quentin Durward*; and in itself this novel is perhaps the most purely refreshing of all reading, precisely because of its curious conjunction of romance and reality.

II. SCOTT AND DUMAS

I do not think that observation, however widely she may extend and however narrowly she may concentrate her view, will find in the history of literature anything quite similar to the achievement of the Waverley Novels. Their uniqueness does not consist wholly, or from the present point of view even mainly, in the fact that for bulk, excellence, and rapidity of production combined they can probably challenge anything else in letters. That they can do this I am by no means disposed to deny. But the point of preeminence at present to be considered is the singular and miraculous fashion in which Sir Walter, taking a kind of writing which had, as we have seen, been tried, or at least tried *at*, for more than two thousand years, and which had never yet been got to run smoothly on its own lines to its own end, by one stroke effected what the efforts of those two millenniums had been bungling and balking themselves over.

That *Waverley* itself is the ideal of an historical novel

need not be contended; and I do not know that any intelligent devotee would contend for anything of the kind. It bears, especially in its earlier chapters, too many marks of the old false procedure; and that insipidity of the nominal hero, which is so constantly and not so unjustly charged against Scott, appears in it pretty strongly. His unworldly education and the flustering influence of the Blessed Bear do not wholly excuse Waverley even in so early a matter as the Balmawhapple Duel. We can hardly blame his brother officers for suspecting him of poltroonery; and he can only clear himself from the charge of being a coward by submitting to that of being a simpleton. And though it is by no means the case that, according to the stupid old rule of critics like Rymer, a hero must be always wise as well as always fortunate, always virtuous as well as always brave, yet the kinds of folly permitted to him are rather limited in number. It is worth while to dwell on this in order to show that what is most wonderful about *Waverley* is not its individual perfection as a work of art; though the Baron, the Bailie, the whole of the actual scenes after the war breaks out, and many other things and persons, exalt it infinitely above anything of the kind known earlier.

But the chief marvel, the real point of interest, is the way in which, after thousands of years of effort to launch one particular ship into one particular ocean, she at last slips as by actual miracle into the waves and sweeps out into the open sea. Exactly how this came about it may be impossible to point out with any exhaustive certainty. Some reasons why the thing had not been done before were given in the last paper; some why it was done at this hour and by this man may perhaps be given in the present. But we shall have to end by assigning at least a large share of the explana-

tion to the formula that "Walter Scott made historical novels because there was in him the virtue of the historical novelist."

Nevertheless we can perhaps find out a little about the component parts of this virtue, a little more about the antecedents and immediate workings of it. The desiderata which have been referred to before—the wide knowledge of history, the affectionate and romantic interest in the past—Scott possessed in common with his generation, but in very much larger measure and more intense degree than most of its members. Nor was it probably of slight importance that when he commenced historical novelist he was a man well advanced in middle age, and not merely provided with immense stores of reading, and with very considerable practice in composition of many kinds, but also experienced in more than one walk of practical business, thoroughly versed in society from the highest to the lowest ranks, and lastly, which is a matter of great importance in all cases, master of a large portion of his own time. It had indeed for years pleased him—as it did afterwards, fortunately or unfortunately, to a still greater extent,—to dispose of much of this leisure in literary labour; but it was in labour of his own choosing, and neither in task-work nor in work necessary for bread-winning. The Sheriffdom and the Clerkship (least distressful of places) freed him from all cares of this kind, augmented as his revenues were by the extraordinary sums paid for his poems.

But the most happy predisposition or preparation to be found in his earlier career was beyond all doubt his apprenticeship, if the word seem not too unceremonious, to these poems themselves. Here indeed he had far less to originate than in the novels. From the

dawn of literature the narrative romance had been written in verse, and from the dawn of literature it had been wont at least to give itself out as historical. I am not sure, however, that the present age, which, while it gives itself airs of being unjust to Scott's prose, is unjust in reality to his poetry, does not even here omit to recognise the full value of his innovations or improvements. Of most classical narrative poems (the *Odyssey* being perhaps the sole exception) the famous saying about Richardson, that if you read for the story you would hang yourself, is true enough. It is true to a great extent of Milton, to some extent even of Spenser, and of nearly all the great narrative poets of the Continent, except Ariosto, in whom it is rather the stories than the story, rather the endless flow of romantic and comic digression than the plot and characters, that attract us. As for the mediæval writers whom Scott more immediately followed, I believe I am in a considerable minority. I find them interesting for the story; but most people do not find them so, and I cannot but admit myself that their interest of this kind varies very much indeed, and is very seldom of the highest.

With Scott it is quite different. Any child who is good for anything knows why *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* was so popular. It was not merely or mainly because the form was novel and daring; for over a hundred years past that form has been as familiar as Pope's couplet was to our great-grandfathers. It was not merely (though it was partly) because the thing is interspersed with passages of delightful and undoubted poetry. It was because it was and is interesting as a story; because the reader wanted to know what became of Deloraine and the Goblin page, and the rest; because the incidents and the scenes attracted, excited, fixed

attention. This was even more the case in *Marmion* (which moreover approaches the historical novel in verse more nearly still), and it never failed in any of the rest. It was, to take some of the least popular of all the poems, because Scott could tell an incident as he has told the vengeance of Bertram Risingham in *Rokeby*, because he could knit together the well-worn and world-old string of familiar trials and temptations as he has done in *The Bridal of Triermain*, that he made his fortune in verse. He had the secret of tale-telling and of adjusting tales to facts. He taught it to Byron and others, and he made the popularity of the thing.

The suitableness of verse, however, for the story as the story, and especially for the historical novel as the historical novel, is so far inferior to that of prose, and the difficulty of keeping up a series of fictions in verse is so immeasurably greater than that of doing the same thing in prose, that I am disposed to believe that *Waverley* would have appeared all the same if there had been no Byron, and no chance of dethronement. In fact, the historical novel had to be created, and Scott had to create it. He had learned—if so dull and deliberate a process as learning can be asserted of what seems to have been as natural and as little troublesome to him as breathing—to build the romantic structure, to decorate it with ornament of fact and fancy from the records of the past, to depict scenery and manners, to project character, even to some extent to weave dialogue. And I do not know that there is any more remarkable proof of his literary versatility in general, and his vocation for the historical novel in particular, than the fact that the very fault of prose romances, especially those immediately preceding his own, was also one most likely to be encouraged by a course of

poetical practice, and yet is one from which he is almost entirely free.

The Godwins and the Mrs Radcliffes had perpetually offended, now by dialogue so glaringly modern that it was utterly out of keeping with their story and their characters, now by the adoption of the conventional stage jargon which is one of the most detestable lingos ever devised by man. With very rare exceptions Sir Walter completely avoids both these dangers. His conversation has not, indeed, that prominence in the method of his work which we shall find it possessing in the case of his great French follower. But it is for the most part full of dramatic suitableness, it is often excellently humorous or pathetic, and it almost always possesses in some degree the Shakespearean quality of fitting the individual and the time and the circumstances without any deliberate archaism or modernism. No doubt Scott's wide reading enabled him to do a certain amount of mosaic work in this kind. Few for instance, except those whose own reading is pretty wide in the plays and pamphlets of the seventeenth century, know how much is worked from them into *The Fortunes of Nigel* and *Woodstock*. But this dialogue is never mere mosaic. It has the quality which, already called Shakespearean, also belongs to men of such different kinds and orders of greatness from Scott's or Shakespeare's as, for instance, Goldsmith—the quality of humanity, independent of time.

Now this is of itself of such importance to the historical novelist, that it may be doubted whether any other kind of craftsman can find it more important. The laborious and uninspired attempt at fidelity to "*temp.* of tale" in language, is nearly as destructive of the equanimity proper to the reception of a novel, as is the perpetual irritation which glaring and taste-

less anachronisms of speech excite. And it is not particularly easy to say whether this knack plays a greater part in the fashioning of the "Scotch novel" (as it used to be called, with an odd mixture of propriety and impropriety), than the other ingredients of plot, character, and description. In regard to plot, Scott was from one point of view a great and confessing sinner; from another, a most admirably justified one. Plot, in the strict sense, he never achieved, and very seldom even attempted to achieve it. It was only a few years ago that there was published for the first time a letter from his intimate friend and one of his best critics, Lady Louisa Stuart (who, to be sure, had literature in the blood of her), stigmatising, more happily perhaps than has ever been done since, Sir Walter's habit of "huddling up the cards and throwing them into the bag in his impatience for a new deal." It may almost be said that Scott never winds up a plot artfully; and the censure which he makes Captain Clutterbuck pass in the introduction to *The Fortunes of Nigel* is undoubtedly valid. When Peacock, in *Crotchet Castle*, made that very crotchety comparison of Scott to a pantomime librettist, he might at least have justified it by the extraordinary fondness of the novelist for a sort of transformation-scene which finishes everything off in a trice, and, as Dryden says of his hasty preacher,

> Runs huddling to the benediction.

The powerful and pathetic scenes at Carlisle and the delightful restoration of the Baron somewhat mask, in *Waverley* itself, the extreme and rather improbable ease with which the hero's pardon is extorted from a government and a general rather prone to deal harshly than mildly with technical traitors. I never could make out how, if Sir Arthur Wardour's fortune was half

so badly dipped as we are given to understand, his son, even with more assistance from Lovel than a young man of spirit was likely to accept from his sister's suitor, could have disengaged it at the end of *The Antiquary*. It is true that this is the least historical of all the novels, but the procedure is the same. Diana and her father were most theatrically lucky, and Clerk Jobson, and even Rashleigh, scoundrels as both were, were astonishingly unlucky, at the close of *Rob Roy*; and it is especially difficult to understand why the attorney was struck off the rolls for joining in the attempt to secure an attainted person who subsequently got off by killing the officers of the law in the execution of their duty. One might go on with this sort of peddling criticism right through the series, winding up with that catastrophe of *Woodstock* where Cromwell's mercy is even more out of character and more unlikely than Cumberland's. Nor are these conclusions the only point of the novels, as usually constructed, where a stop-watch critic may blaspheme without the possibility of at least technical refutation of his blasphemies. Scott has a habit (due no doubt in part to his rapid and hazardous composition) of introducing certain characters and describing certain incidents with a pomp and prodigality of detail quite out of proportion to their real importance in the story. And even a person who would no more hesitate to speak disrespectfully of the Unities than of the Equator may admit that such an arrangement as that in *Rob Roy*, where something like a quarter of the book is taken up with the adventures of four-and-twenty hours, is not wholly artistic.

Yet for my part I hold that the defence made by the shadowy Author of *Waverley* in the Introduction aforesaid is a perfectly sound one, and that it applies with special propriety to the historical division of the novels,

and with them to historical novels generally. The Captain's gibe, conveyed in an anecdote of "his excellent grandmother," shows that Scott (as he was far too shrewd not to do) saw the weak points as well as the strong of this defence. Indeed I am not sure that he quite saw the strength of the strongest of all. It was all very well to plead that he was only "trying to write with sense and spirit a few scenes unlaboured and loosely put together, but which had sufficient interest in them to amuse in one corner the pain of body; in another to relieve anxiety of mind; in a third place to unwrinkle a brow bent with the furrows of daily toil; in another to fill the place of bad thoughts and suggest better; in yet another to induce an idler to study the history of his country; in all, save where the perusal interrupted the discharge of serious duties, to furnish harmless amusement." But the Captain might, if he had ventured to take such a liberty with the author of his being, have answered: "But, sir, could not you amuse and relieve and unwrinkle and fill and induce and furnish, and all the rest on't, at the same time joining your flats a little more carefully?"

The Eidolon with the blotted revise would have done better, argumentatively speaking, to have stuck to his earlier plea, that, following Smollett and Le Sage, he tried to write rather a "history of the miscellaneous adventures which befall an individual in the course of life, than the plot of a regular and concerted *epopoeia*, where every step brings us nearer to the final catastrophe." For it so happens that this plea is much nearer to the special business and ends of the historical novelist than to those of the avowedly inventive writer. As a matter of fact, we do know that Smollett certainly, and suspect that Le Sage probably, wove a great deal of actual experience into their stories; while Fielding,

who is in the passage cited contrasted with them, seems never to have incorporated incidents, and at most a few characters, such as those of his wife, Allen, and one or two more whom he drew mainly in outline. A man who thus keeps clear of the servitude of actual occurrence, communicating reality by the results of his observation of human nature and human life generally, can shape the ends of his story as well as roughhew them. But the man who makes incident and adventure his first object, and in some cases at least draws them from actual records, is bound to allow himself a licence much greater than epic strictness permits. That truth is stranger than fiction is only the copybook form of a reflection which a hundred critics have made and enforced in different ways since a thousand writers put the occasion before them —to wit, that in real life things happen in a more remiss and disorderly fashion than is allowable in fiction.

This point is indeed put very well by Scott himself in the introduction to *The Abbot*: "For whatever praise may be due to the ingenuity which brings to a general combination all the loose threads of a narrative, like the knitter at the finishing of her stocking, I am greatly deceived if in many cases a superior advantage is not attained by the air of reality which the deficiency of explanation attaches to a work written on a different system. In life itself many things befall every mortal of which the individual never knows the real cause or origin; and were we to point out the most marked distinction between a real and a fictitious narrative, we would say that the former in reference to the remote causes of the events it relates is obscure, doubtful, and mysterious, whereas in the latter case it is a part of the author's duty to afford satisfactory details upon

the causes of the events he has recorded, and, in a word, to account for everything."

The historical novel, however, escapes this stricture in part because there the irregularities, the unexpectednesses, the disproportions of action, are things accepted and not to be argued about. Certain well-attested points and contrasts in the character and conduct of Marlborough and of Catherine the Second might be justly objected to as unnatural in fiction: such historical incidents as Clive's defence of Arcot, or as the last fight of the *Revenge*, would at least be frowned or smiled at as if they were mere inventions. Dealing as the historical novelist must with actual and authenticated things like these, and moulding, as he will if he is a deacon in his craft, his fictitious incidents on their pattern, and to suit them, he can take to himself all the irregularity, all the improbability, all the outrages on the exact scale of Bossu, in which life habitually indulges. And he is not obliged,—he is even decidedly unwise if he attempts it—to adjust these things to theory and probability by elaborate analyses of character. That is not his business at all: he not only may, but should, leave it to quite a different kind of practitioner. His is the big brush, the bold foreshortening, the composition which is all the more effective according as it depends least upon over-subtle strokes and shades of line and colour. Not that he is to draw carelessly or colour coarsely, but that niggling finish of any kind is unnecessary and even prejudicial to his effects. And in the recognition, at least in the practical recognition, of these laws of the craft, as Scott set the example, so he also left very little for any one else to improve upon. He may have been equalled; he has never been surpassed.

I have before now referred by anticipation to another

point of his intuition, his instinctive grasp of the first law of the historical novel, that the nominal hero and heroine, the ostensibly central interest and story shall not be or concern historical persons, or shall concern them only in some aspect unrecorded or at best faintly traced in history. The advantages of this are so clear and obvious that it is astounding that they should have been overlooked as they were, not merely by 'prentices of all kinds and all times, but by persons of something more than moderate ability like G. P. R. James and others. These advantages have been partly touched upon, but one of them has not, I think, been mentioned, and it may introduce to us another very important feature of the subject. It is constantly useful, and it may at times be indispensable, for the historical novelist to take liberties with history. The extent to which this is permissible or desirable may indeed be matter for plentiful disagreement. It is certainly carrying matters too far to make, as in *Castle Dangerous*, a happy ending to a story the whole historical and romantic complexion of which required the ending to be unhappy; but Sir Walter was admittedly but the shadow of himself when *Castle Dangerous* was written. Although Dryasdust and Smelfungus have both done after their worst fashion in objecting to his anachronisms in happier days, yet I certainly think that it was not necessary to make Shakespeare the author of *Midsummer Night's Dream* in the eleventh year of his age, if not earlier, as is done in *Kenilworth*, or to play the tricks with chronology required by the narrative of the misdeeds of Ulrica in *Ivanhoe*. Nothing is gained in either of these cases for the story. But there are cases where the story does undoubtedly gain by taking liberties with history. And it is evident that this can be done much more easily and much more

effectively when the actual historical characters whose life is, so to speak, "coted and marked," do not play the first parts as far as the interest of the story goes.

But it might be tedious to examine more in detail the special characteristics of work so well known. Enough must have been said to show that Scott had discovered, and to a great extent had discovered consciously, not merely how to write an historical novel, but how to teach others to write it. His critical faculty, if not extraordinarily subtle, was always as sound and shrewd as it was good-natured. And there is hardly a better, as there is not a more interesting, example of this combination than the remarks in the "Diary" under the dates of October 17th and 18th, 1826, occasioned by Harrison Ainsworth's and Horace Smith's attempts in his style—*Sir John Chiverton* and *Brambletye House*. In one so utterly devoid of the slightest tendency to over-value himself, his adoption of Swift's phrase,

> Which I was born to introduce,
> Refined it first and shewed its use,

is a very strong affidavit of claim; and it is one which, as we have seen, is absolutely justified. No less so are the remarks which follow a little later, on what he calls, with his unfailing *epieikeia*, his "own errors, or, if you will, those of the style." "One advantage," he says, "I think I still have over all of them. They may do it with a better grace, but I do it more naturally." And then in a succession of light taps with the finger he indicates not a few of the faults of the worst sort of historical novel: the acquiring information in order to write, instead of using in an unconstrained fashion what has become part of the regular furniture of the mind; the dragging in historical events by head and shoulders; the too open stealing of actual passages

and pages from chronicles or previous works on the subject, and so forth; though he ends up with his usual honesty by confessing once more his own occasional carelessness of the management of the story.

He did not consider that his own plea of being "hurried on so that he has no time to think of the story" is a great deal more than an excuse. There is extremely little danger of much fault being found, except by professional fault-finders, with any writer who neglects the conduct of his story because he has so much story to tell. It is the other people, the people who are at their wits' end to know what ought to come next, who are intolerable, not those who have such an abundance of arrows in their quiver that they sometimes pull out one the notch of which does not exactly fit the string. I remember reading Mr Crockett's *The Raiders*, —one of the best of those books, which have been recently[1] written in the more or less direct following of Scott—when it first appeared. I had to read it "in the way of business" (as Mr Turnbull would say), and I soon saw that in the way of business there were many things that might be said against it. It was here and there too like this thing and that thing; its parts did not hang very well together; there were improbabilities not a few, and the crowning incident was not a little wanting in reason. But, having noted down these things duly, I turned to the beginning of the book once more and read it straight through, every word of it, a second time for my own private and unprofessional delectation. And I should suppose that the same thing must have happened and happened often to critics between 1815 and 1830.

For who can ever praise enough, or read enough, or enjoy enough, those forty-eight volumes of such a

[1] 1895.

reader's paradise as nowhere else exists? The very abundance and relish of their pure delightsomeness has obscured in them qualities which would have made a score of reputations. Of passion there may be little or none; that string in Scott's case, as in those of Bacon, of Milton, of Southey, and others, was either wanting, or the artist's hand shrank from playing on it. But there is almost everything else. I once began and mislaid, a collection of what would be called in our modern jargon "realist" details from Scott, which showed as shrewd a knowledge at least and as uncompromising an acknowledgment of the weaknesses of human nature as with a little jargon and a little brutality would have set up half a dozen psychological novelists[1]. In the observation and delineation of his own countrymen he is acknowledged to have excelled all other writers; by which I do not mean merely that no one has drawn Scotsmen as he has, but that no one writer has drawn that writer's countrymen as Scott has. And the consensus, I believe, of the best critics would put him next to Shakespeare as a creator of individual character of the miscellaneous human sort, however far he may be below not merely Shakespeare but Fielding, Thackeray, and perhaps Le Sage in a certain subtle intimacy of detail and a certain massive completeness of execution. And all these gifts—all these and many more—he put at the service of the kind that he "was born to introduce," the kind of the historical novel.

Although Alexandre Dumas had begun to write years before Sir Walter Scott's death, he had not at

[1] Curiously enough, after writing the above, I came across the following passage in a little-known but extraordinarily shrewd French critic of English literature, Mr Browning's friend M. Milsand. "Il y a plus de philosophie dans ses [Scott's] contes (quoique la philosophie n'en soit pas le caractère saillant) que dans bon nombre de romans philosophiques."

that time turned his attention to the novels which have ranked him as second only to Sir Walter himself in that department. Nor was he by any means Scott's first French imitator. He was busy on dramatic composition, in which, though he never attained anything like Scott's excellence in his own kind of poetry, he was nearly as great an innovator in his own country and way. Nor can it be doubted that this practice helped him considerably in his later work, just as Scott's poetry had helped him, and in particular that it taught Dumas a more closely knit construction and a more constant "eye to the audience" than Scott had always shown. Not indeed that the plots of Dumas, as plots, are by any means of exceptional regularity. The crimes and punishment of Milady may be said to communicate a certain unity to *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, the vengeance of Dantès to *Monte Cristo*, and other things to others. But when they are looked at from the strictly dramatic side, all more or less are "chronicle plays" in the form of novels, rather than novels; lengths of adventure prolonged or cut short at the pleasure or convenience of the writer rather than definite evolutions of a certain definite scheme, which has got to come to an end when the ball is fully unrolled. The advantage of Dumas's dramatic practice shows itself most in the business-like way in which at his best he works by *tableaux*, connected, it may be, with each other rather by sequence and identity of personages than by strict causality, but each possessing a distinct dramatic and narrative interest of its own, and so enchaining the attention. There are episodes without end in Dumas; but there are comparatively few (at least in his best work) of the "loose ends," of the incidents, neither complete in themselves nor contributing anything in particular to the general story,

to which Sir Walter pleads guilty, and which certainly are to be found in him.

Another point in which Dumas may be said to have improved, or at any rate alternated, upon Scott, and which also may, without impropriety, be connected with his practice for the stage, is the enormously increased part allotted to dialogue in his novels. Certainly Scott was not weak in dialogue; on the contrary, the intrinsic excellence of the individual speeches of his characters in humour, in truth to nature, in pathos, and in many other important points, is decidedly above the Frenchman's. But his dialogue plays a much smaller part in the actual evolution of the story. Take down at hazard three or four different volumes of Dumas from the shelf; open them, and run over the pages, noting of what stuff the letterpress is composed. Then do exactly the same with the same number of Scott. You will find that the number of whole pages, and still more the number of consecutive pages, wholly filled with dialogue, or variegated with other matter in hardly greater proportion than that of stage directions, is far larger in the French than in the English master. It is true that the practice of Dumas varies in this respect. In his latter books especially, in his less good ones at all times, there is a much greater proportion of solid matter. But then the reason of this is quite obvious. He was here falling either in his own person, or by proxy, into those very practices of interpolating lumps of chronicle, and laboriously describing historic incident and scene, with which, in the passage above quoted, Scott reproaches his imitators. But at his best Dumas delighted in telling his tale as much as possible through the mouths of his characters. In all his most famous passages—the scene at the Bastion Saint-Gervais in *Les Trois Mous-*

quetaires, the Vin de Porto and its ushering scenes in *Vingt Ans Après*, the choicest episodes of *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, the crises of *La Reine Margot* and *Les Quarante-Cinq*—the thing is always talked rather than narrated. It is hardly fanciful to trace Dumas's preference for heroes like D'Artagnan and Chicot to the fact that they had it by kind to talk.

I do not know whether it is worth while to lay much stress on another difference between Scott and Dumas —the much greater length of the latter's novels and his tendency to run them into series. Scott only did the latter once, in the case of *The Monastery* and *The Abbot*, while it was probably more a determination that the British public should like him yet, in his dealings with so tempting a subject as the troubles of Queen Mary's reign, than any inherent liking for the practice that determined him to it in this case. Even if we neglect the trilogy system, of which the adventures of D'Artagnan and Chicot are the main specimens, the individual length of Dumas's books is much greater than that of Scott's. Putting such giants as *Monte Cristo* and the *Vicomte de Bragelonne* aside, *Vingt Ans Après* would make, I should think, at least two *Waverleys*, and *La Reine Margot* (one of the shortest) an *Ivanhoe* and a half. But this increase in length was only a return to old practices; for Scott himself had been a great shortener of the novel. To say nothing of the romances of chivalry and the later imitations of them, Le Sage, Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, Mrs Radcliffe, had all in their chief work run to a length far exceeding what Sir Walter usually thought sufficient. But I am not sure whether even Mademoiselle de Scudéry's proverbial prolixity much exceeds in any one instance the length of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*.

That this length is pretty closely connected with the

conversational manner just noticed cannot, I think, be doubted. There is nothing so endless as talk; and inasmuch as an hour's leisurely speech will fill some thirty octavo pages, valiant talkers like Miss Bates must deliver (though fortunately not in a form which abides with posterity) their volume a day, year in and year out, given health and listeners, without any difficulty or much exertion. That is three hundred and sixty-five volumes a year, whereas five were all that even Southey's brazen-bowelled industry warranted itself to produce; and I do not think that Sir Walter himself in his most tremendous bursts of energy exceeded the rate of about a dozen.

Of the advantages and disadvantages, on the other hand, of the length thus reintroduced into novel-writing, it is not possible to speak with equal confidence. People who read very fast, who like to read more than once, and who are pleased to meet old friends in constantly new situations, as a rule, I think, like long books; but the average subscriber to circulating libraries does not. The taste for them is perhaps the more generous as it certainly is the most ancient and most human. It showed itself in the cycles of the ancients and of mediæval romance: it positively revelled in the extraordinary filiations of the *Amadis* story; and it has continued to assert itself in different forms to the present day, now in that of long single books, now in that of direct series and continuations, now in that of books like Thackeray's and Trollope's, which are not exactly series, but which keep touch with each other by the community of more or fewer characters. Of course it is specially easy to tempt and indulge this taste in the historical department of novel-writing. Even as it is, Dumas himself has made considerable progress in the task of writing a connected novel-

history of France from the English wars to the Revolution of 1789. I really do not know that, especially now when the taste for the romance seems to have revived somewhat vigorously, it would be an inconceivable thing if somebody should write an English historical *Amadis* in more than as many generations as the original, deducing the fortunes of an English family from King Arthur to Queen Victoria. Let it be observed that I do not as a critic recommend this scheme, nor do I specially hanker after its results as a reader. But it is not an impossible thing, and it would hardly exceed the total of Dumas's printed work. I have never been able to count that mighty list of volumes twice with the same result, a phenomenon well known in legend respecting the wonderful works of nature or of art. But it comes, I think, to somewhere about two hundred and forty volumes; that is to say, a hundred and twenty novels of the length of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* or *La Reine Margot*. And as that would cover the time suggested, at not more than ten or twelve years to a novel, it should surely be ample.

To return to a proper seriousness: the main points of strictly technical variation in Dumas as compared with Scott are thus the more important use made of dialogue, the greater length of the stories, and the tendency to run them on in series. In quality of enjoyment, also, the French master added something to his English model. If Scott is not deep (I think him much deeper than it is the fashion to allow), Dumas is positively superficial. His rapid and absorbing current of narrative gives no time for any strictly intellectual exertion on the part either of writer or reader; the style as style is even less distinct and less distinguished than Scott's; we receive not only few ideas but even

few images of anything but action—few pictures of scenery, no extraordinarily vivid touches of customs or manners. Dumas is an infinitely inferior master of character to Scott; he can make up a personage admirably, but seldom attains to a real character. Chicot himself and Porthos are the chief exceptions; for D'Artagnan is more a type than an individual, Athos is the incarnate gentleman chiefly, Aramis is incomplete and shadowy, and Monte Cristo is a mere creature of melodrama.

But Dumas excels Scott himself in the peculiar and sustained faculty by which he can hold his reader by and for the story. With Sir Walter one is never quite unconscious, and one is delighted to be conscious, of the existence and individuality of the narrator. The "architect, artist, and man" (may Heaven forgive me, as Scott certainly would, for coupling his idea in any way with that of the subject of this phrase!) is always more or less before us, with his vast, if not altogether orderly, reading, his ardent patriotism, his saturation with romance coexisting with the shrewdest commonsense and knowledge of business, above all that golden temperament which made him a man of letters without pedantry and without vanity, a man of the world without frivolity and without guile, a "man of good" without prudery and without goodiness.

Of Dumas's personality (and no doubt this is in a way a triumph of his art) we never think at all. We think of nothing but of the story: whether D'Artagnan will ever bring the diamonds safe home; whether the compact between Richelieu and Milady can possibly be fulfilled; whether that most terrible of all "black strap" that flowed into the pewter pot when Grimaud tried the cask will do its intended duty or not; whether Margaret will be able to divert the silk cord in Alençon's

hand from its destination on La Môle's neck. No doubt Scott has moments of the same arresting excitement; but they are not so much his direct object, and from the difference of his method they are not so prominent or so numerous or engineered in such a manner as to take an equally complete hold of the reader. No doubt the generation which as yet had not Scott affected to find similar moments in Mrs Radcliffe; but oh! the difference to us of the moment when Emily draws aside the Black Veil, and the moment when the corpse of Mordaunt shoots above water with the moonlight playing on the gold hilt of the dagger! Dumas indeed has no Wandering Willie; he had not poetry enough in him for that. But in the scenes where Scott as a rule excels him—the scenes where the mere excitement of adventure is enhanced by nobility of sentiment—he has a few, with the death of Porthos at the head of them, which are worthy of Scott himself; while of passages like the famous rescue of Henry Morton from the Cameronians he has literally hundreds.

It was, then, this strengthening and extending of the absorbing and exciting quality which the historical novel chiefly owed to Dumas, just as it owed its first just and true concoction and the indication of almost all the ways in which it could seek perfection to Scott. I shall not, I think, be charged with being unjust to the pupil; but, wonderful as his work is, I think it not so much likely as certain that it never would have been done at all if it had not been for the Master.

III. THE SUCCESSORS

It was evidently impossible that such a combination of luck and genius as the Historical Novel, when at last it appeared from Scott's hands, should lack immediate and unlimited imitation. As has been said, some

considerable number of years passed before the greatest of Sir Walter's successors,—the only successor who can be said to have made distinct additions to the style—turned his attention to novel-writing. But as the popularity of Scott, not only in his own country, but elsewhere, was instantaneous, so was the following of him. The peace after Waterloo assisted this popularity in the odd way in which political and historical coincidences often do influence the fortunes of literature; and almost the whole of Europe, besides English-speaking America, began not merely to read Scott, not merely to translate him, but to write in his style. It may even be doubted whether the subsequent or simultaneous vogue abroad of his poetical supplanter Byron did not assist the popularity of his novels; for different as the two men and the two styles intrinsically are, they have no small superficial resemblance of appeal. In France the Royalism and the Romanticism alike of the Restoration fastened eagerly on the style, and Victor Hugo was only the greatest, if the most immature, of scores of writers who hastened to produce the historical, especially the chivalrous and mediæval, romance. Germany did likewise, and set on foot as well a trade of "Scotch novels made in Germany," of which I believe the famous *Walladmor* (to which Scott himself refers, and the history of which De Quincey has told at characteristic length) was by no means the only example. *Walladmor* appeared in 1823. G. P. R. James's *Richelieu*, the first English example of considerable note by an author who gave his name, came in 1825; while in America Cooper was four years earlier with *The Spy*.

Hugo himself began writing novels (obviously on Scott's suggestion, however little they might be like Scott) with *Han d'Islande* in the same year as *Wallad-*

mor, and Germany, though clinging still to her famous and to some extent indigenous romance of fantasy, produced numerous early imitators of Scott of a less piratical character than the Leipsic forger. Italy with Manzoni and *I Promessi Sposi* in 1827 was a little, but only a little later, so that long before the darkness came on him and to some extent before even his worldly fortunes were eclipsed, Scott could literally see as no author before him or since has ever seen the whole of Europe not merely taking its refreshment under the boughs of the tree he had planted, but nursing seeds and shoots of it in foreign ground. In comparison with this the greatest literary dictatorships of the past were but titular royalties. Voltaire, whose influence came nearest to it in intensity and diffusion, was merely the cleverest, most versatile, and most piquant writer of an age whose writers were generally of the second class. He had invented no kind, for even the satirical fantasy-tale was but borrowed from Hamilton and others. As a provider of patterns and models, he was inferior both to Montesquieu and to Rousseau. But Scott enjoyed in this respect such a royalty in both senses, the sense of pre-eminence and the sense of patent rights, as had never been known before. When he saved the beginning of *Waverley* from among the fishing-tackle in the old writing-desk, no one knew how to write a historical novel, because no one had in the proper sense written such a thing, though many had tried. In a few years the whole of Europe was greedily reading historical novels, and a very considerable part of the literary population of Europe was busily writing them.

Indeed Scott was still in possession of all his faculties, and the imitations of him in England as well as in other countries had not had time, or had not fallen under the hands of the right man to produce anything

but mere imitation, when a book of far greater merit than anything else anterior to Dumas appeared. I do not mean *Notre Dame de Paris*, for though this is historical after a kind, the history is the least part of it, and Hugo with all his Titanic power never succeeded in writing a good novel of any sort. The book to which I refer and which appeared in 1829, a good deal before *Notre Dame de Paris*, is Mérimée's *Chronique de Charles IX*. This book has been very variously judged, and Mérimée's most recent and best critical biographer, M. Augustin Filon, does not, I think, put it quite as high as I do. It has of course obvious faults. Mérimée, who had already followed Scott in *La Jacquerie*, though for some reason or other he chose in that case to give a quasi-dramatic form to the work, had all his life the peculiarity (which may be set down either to some excess of the critical or some flaw of the creative part in him) of taking a style, doing something that was almost or quite a masterpiece in it, and then dropping it altogether. He did so in this instance, and the *Chronique* had no follower from his hand. But it showed the way to all Frenchmen who followed, including Dumas himself, the way of transporting the Scottish pattern into France, and blending with it the attractions (including one peculiarly French and inconvenient) necessary to acclimatise it.

It cannot however be denied that in this immense and unprecedented dissemination the old proverb of the fiddle and the rosin was plentifully illustrated and justified. It was only Scott's good-nature which led him to concede that his English imitators might perhaps "do it with a better grace"; while there is no doubt at all that he was far within the mark in saying that he himself "did it more natural." The curses which have been already mentioned, and others, rested

on the best of them; even upon James, even upon Ainsworth, even upon Bulwer. I used to be as fond of *Henry Masterton* and *Old St Paul's*, and those about them, as every decently constructed boy ought to be; and I can read a good many of the works of both authors now with a great deal of resignation and with a very hearty preference for them over most of the novels of the present[1] day. I am afraid I cannot say quite so much of the first Lord Lytton, who never seems to me to have found his proper sphere in novel writing till just before his death. But still no competent critic, I suppose, would deny that *The Last Days of Pompeii* is one of the very best attempts to do what has never yet been thoroughly done, or that *The Last of the Barons* is a very fine chronicle novel. So too I remember reading *Brambletye House* itself with a great deal of pleasure not so very many years ago. But in the handling of all of these and of their immediate contemporaries and successors before the middle of the century there is what Mr Morris's melancholy lover found in running over that list of his loves as he rode unwitting to the Hill of Venus—"some lack, some coldness."

One could forgive the two horsemen readily enough, as well as other tricks of James's, if he were not at once too conventional and too historical. To read *Mary of Burgundy* and before or after that exercise to read *Quentin Durward*, so near to it in time and subject, is to move in two different worlds. In *Quentin Durward* you may pick holes enough if you choose, as even Bishop Heber, a contemporary, a friend, I think, of Scott's, a good man, and a good man of letters, does in his Indian Journal. It takes some uncommon liberties with historical accuracy, and it would not

[1] 1895 (*not* 1923).

escape scot-free as a novel from a charge of *Lèse-probabilité*. But it is all perfectly alive and of a piece; the story, whether historical or fictitious, moves uniformly and takes the reader along with it; the characters (though I will give up Hayraddin to the sainted manes of the Bishop) are real people who do real things and talk real words. When the excellent Mr Senior, meaning to be complimentary, calls Louis and Charles "perfectly faithful copies," he uses a perfectly inadequate expression. He might as well call Moroni's *Tailor* or Velasquez's *Philip IV* a perfectly faithful copy. They are no copies; they are re-creations, agreeing with all we know of what, for want of a better word, we call the originals, but endowed with independent life.

In *Mary of Burgundy*, which is generally taken to be one of the best of its author's, as in all that author's books more or less, this wholeness and symmetry are too often wanting. The history, where it is history, is too often tediously lugged in; the fictitious characters lack at once power and keeping; and there is a fatal convention of language, manners, general tone which is the greatest fault of all. Instead of the only less than Shakespearean universality of Scott's humanity —which does equally for characters of the eleventh, the fifteenth, or the eighteenth century, simply because it is always human,—James gives us a sort of paint-and-pasteboard substitute for flesh and blood which cannot be said to be definitely out of character with any particular time, simply because it never could have been vividly appropriate to any time at all. In fact such caricatures as *Barbazure* were more than justified by the historical-romantic novels of a hundred years ago, which might have gone far, and indeed did go some way, to inspire a fear that the kind would become as much a nuisance and would fall as far short

of its own highest possibilities as the Romance of Terror which had preceded it. James was by no means an ignorant man, or a man of little literary power. But he had not that gift of character which is the greatest of all the gifts of a novelist of whatever kind, and as a historical novelist he was not sufficiently saturated with the spirit of any period. Far less had he that extension of the historical faculty which enabled Scott, though he might make small blunders easy to be detected by any schoolmaster if not by any schoolboy, at once to grasp the spirit of almost any period of which he had himself read something or of any person with whom he was himself in even slight sympathy.

Harrison Ainsworth had I think more "fire in his belly" than James ever had; but he burned it out too soon, and unluckily for him he lived and wrote for a very long time after the flame had changed to smoke. Fewer people perhaps now know than formerly knew that most successful of Father Prout's serious or quasi-serious poems, the piece in which a moral is drawn from the misfortune of the bird in

> —the current old
> Of the deep Garonne

for the warning of the then youthful novelist. But it was certainly needed. I am glad to believe, and indeed partly to know, that Ainsworth has not lost his hold of the younger generation to-day as some other novelists have. His latest books never I think came into any cheap form, and therefore are not likely to have come in many boys' way; but sixpenny editions of *The Tower of London* and *Windsor Castle* are[1] seen often enough in the hands of youth, which certainly they do not misbecome. Not many, however, I should fancy, either

[1] 1895. Perhaps less now? (1923).

now read or ever have read Ainsworth much when they were once out of their nonage.

He has, as indeed I have said, more fire, more spirit than James. He either found out for himself, or took the hint early from Dumas, that abundant dialogue will make a story go more trippingly off than abundant description. But there is a great deal of smoke mixed with his fire, more than with that of James; his chariots though they move, drive heavily; he writes anything but good English; and his dialogue is uncommonly poor stuff for any eye or ear which is naturally, or by study has become, attentive to "keeping." It may, I think, be laid down without much rashness that though the attractions which will suffice to lure a reader through one reading, and in some cases even enable him to enjoy or endure a second, are very numerous and various, there must, in all but the very rarest cases, be one or both of two things, style and character, to make him return again and again to any novel. Now Ainsworth certainly had neither of these; he had not nearly so much of either as James. Most of the schoolboys who read him could with a little practice write as well as he does; and though his puppets box it about in a sufficiently business-like manner, they are puppets of the most candid and unmistakable kind. As far as I can remember Crichton and Esclairmonde used to affect me with more interest than most of them: and I am by no means certain that this was not as much due to the lady's name as to anything else. Generally speaking, one does not, even as a boy, feel them to be alive at all when the story is ended. They have rattled their mimic quarterstaves bravely and gone back to their box. After a time the novelist lost the faculty even of making them rattle their quarterstaves; and then the wreck was indeed total.

The third member of the trio, who provided England with historical novels during the second quarter of the century, had of course far more purely literary talent than either James or Ainsworth. I have never been able to rate Bulwer so highly as many people have done; but no one can possibly deny him a literary talent not often surpassed in volume, in variety, or in certain kinds of vigour. Why he never did anything better in any one kind than he at least seems to me to have done is a question over which I have often puzzled myself. Perhaps it was a one-sided critical faculty—it was certainly, to say the least, unfortunate for a man in the spring of his literary career to try to laugh down Mr Alfred Tennyson, and in the winter thereof to try the same operation upon Mr William Morris. Perhaps it was the diffusion and dispersion of his aims and energies between politics, literature, and society, between prose, verse, and drama. Perhaps it was the unlucky sentimentality of thought and the still more unlucky tawdriness of language which so long defrayed the exercises of satirists. At any rate, he never seems to me to have done anything great or small that can be called a masterpiece, except *The Haunted and the Haunters*, which is all but, if not quite, perfect[1]. Still he did many things surprisingly well, and I do not know that his historical novels were not among the best of them. That Lord Tennyson, who admired few things at all and fewer if any bad ones, should have

[1] It is perhaps desirable to lay stress on the word "perfect" lest anybody should exclaim "What! you put a short ghost-story before *My Novel?*" Now I confess that I do not attach much importance to mere bulk or mere shortness one way or the other. But in the text I am only speaking of the relative consummateness of a thing in its own kind. Both *My Novel*, and others of the books, especially the latest (I have no small admiration for *Kenelm Chillingly*), may be more considerable things in a kind deserving more consideration than the thing and the kind of *The Haunted and the Haunters*. But they are not so consummate.

admired *Harold* is almost decisive in its favour, though I own I like *The Last of the Barons* better myself, and consider it all but what it ought to be. If you mixed *The Last of the Barons* with *The Black Arrow*, another faulty but admirable book of another generation, but on the same subject, you would go very near to perfection. *The Last Days of Pompeii*, though it has a double share of the two faults mentioned above, is, as has been said, easily first in its class, or first except *Hypatia*, of which more presently. No doubt the playwright's faculty which enabled Lord Lytton to write more than one of the few very good acting English plays of the century, stood him in stead here as it stood Dumas. Perhaps this very faculty prevented him more than it prevented Dumas from writing a supremely good novel. For the narrative and the dramatic faculties are after all not the same thing and the one is never a perfect substitute for the other. Yet I happen to know that there are some who, regarding him with considerably more admiration than I do, set his shortcomings down to a far more serious and damaging disability than this. They doubt whether he had in any great, or at least in any constant degree, the faculty of making a "live" figure—one of those which can defy time and occupy space. Nor of course, if this is once admitted, is there anything more to be said.

No reasonable space would suffice for a detailed criticism, while a mere catalogue would be very unamusing, of the imitators of these men, or of Scott directly, who practised the historical novel let us say, between 1825 and 1850. The best of them (so far as I can remember) was an anonymous writer, whose name I think was Emma Robinson, and whose three chief works were *Whitehall*, *Whitefriars*, and *Owen Tudor*. These books held a station about midway between

James and Ainsworth, and they seem to me to have been as superior to the latter in interest as they were to the former in bustle and movement. But I think there can be no doubt that the influence of Dumas, who had by their time written much, was great and direct on them. More than once have I attempted in my graver years to read again that well-loved friend of my boyhood James Grant; but each time my discomfiture has been grievous. The excellent Chaplain-General Gleig was a James of less fertility and liveliness, indeed I fear he must be pronounced to have deserved the same description as Mr Jingle's packing-cases. In some others, such as G. W. M. Reynolds, I confess that my study is but little. But in such things of Reynolds as I have read, though it would be absurd to say that there is no ability, I never found it devoted to anything but a very inferior class of bookmaking.

Marryat, close as he came to the historical kind, seems to have felt an instinctive dislike or disqualification for it; and it will be noticed that his more purely historical scenes and passages,—the account of the Mutiny at the Nore in *The King's Own*, that of the battle of Cape St Vincent in *Peter Simple*, and so forth —are as a rule episodes and scarcely even episodes. And though Lever wrought the historical part of his stories more closely and intimately into their substance, yet I should class him only with the irregulars of the Historical Brigade. He is of course most like a regular in *Charles O'Malley*. Yet even there one sees the difference. The true historical novelist, as has been pointed out more than once, employs the reader's presumed interest in historical scene and character as an instrument to make his own work attractive. Lever does nothing of the kind. His head was full of the stories he had heard at Brussels from the veterans of the

Peninsula, of Waterloo, and even of the Grande Armée. But it was at least equally full (as he showed long after when he had got rid of the borrowed stories) of quaint inventions and shrewd observations of his own. And even as a historical novelist the original part got the better of him. Wellington and Stewart and Crawford are little more than names to us; they are not one-tenth part as real or one-hundredth part as interesting as Major Monsoon. Nor is it the actual fate of war, at Ciudad Rodrigo or on the Coa, that engrosses us so much as the pell-mell fighting, the feats of horsemanship, the devilled kidneys (that for some incomprehensible reason so did irritate Edgar Poe) and all the helter-skelter liberties with probability and chronology and everything else which cram that wonderful and to some people never wearisome medley.

So too we need not trouble ourselves much with Dickens's efforts in the kind for a not dissimilar reason. *Barnaby Rudge* earlier and *A Tale of Two Cities* later, work in a great deal of historical fact and some historical character, and both fact and character are studied with a good deal of care. But the historical characters are almost entirely unimportant; while the whole thing in each case is pure Dickens in its faults as in its merit. We are never really in the Gordon Riots of 1780 or in the Terror of thirteen years later. We are in the author's No Man's Land of time and space where manners and ethics and language and everything else are marked with "Charles Dickens," and the well-known flourish after it.

It was about the middle of the century, I think, or a little earlier, that the vogue which had sped the Historical Novel for more than a technical generation began to fail it, at least in England with which we are chiefly concerned. The Dumas furnaces were still working full blast abroad, and of course there was no actual

cessation of production at home. But the public taste, either out of satiety, or out of mere caprice, or tempted by attractive novelties, began to go in quite other directions. Charlotte Brontë had already begun, and George Eliot was about to begin styles of novels entirely different from the simple and rather conventional romance which writers, unable to keep at the level of Scott, had taken to turning out. The general run of Dickens's performance had been in a quite different direction. So was Thackeray's, which in its perfection was just beginning, though he was to produce not a little and at least one unsurpassable thing in the historic kind. Many minor kinds typified by work as different as *The Heir of Redclyffe* and *Guy Livingstone*, as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Warden* were springing up or to spring. And so the Historical Novel though never exactly abandoned (for George Eliot herself and most of the writers already named or alluded to, as well as others like Whyte-Melville, tried it now and then) dropped, so to speak, into the ruck, and for a good many years was rather despiteously spoken of by critics until the popularity of Mr Blackmore's *Lorna Doone* came to give it a new lease.

Yet in the first decade of this its disfavour, and while most writers' and readers' attention was devoted to other things, it could boast of the two best books that had been written in it since the death of Scott; one an imperishable masterpiece, the other a book which, popular as it has been, has never had its due yet,—*Esmond* and *Westward Ho!*

That when anybody is perpetually laughing at another body or at something, this facetiousness really means that the laugher is secretly enamoured of the object of ridicule, is a great though not an universal truth which has been recognised and illustrated by

authorities of the most diverse age and excellence from the author of *Much Ado About Nothing* downwards. It was well seen of Thackeray in the matter of the Historical Novel. He had been jesting at it for the best part of twenty years—that is to say for the whole of his literary career. He had made free with it a thousand times in a hundred different ways, from light touches and gibes in his miscellaneous articles to the admirable set of Burlesques, to the longer parodies, if parodies they can properly be called, of *Rebecca and Rowena* (one of his best things) and *The Legend of the Rhine*, and on the biggest scale of all to that strange unpleasant masterly failure *Catherine*. It is to be presumed, though it is not certain, that when he thus made fun of historical novels, he did not think he should live to be a historical novelist. Notwithstanding which, as every one knows, he lived to write not one, but two, and the beginning of a third.

It is not necessary to say much here about *Denis Duval*, or to attempt to decide between the opinions of those who say that it would have been the author's masterpiece, and of those who think that it could at best have stood to *The Virginians* as *The Virginians* stands to *Esmond*. It is however worth noting that *Denis Duval* displays that extremely careful and methodical scaffolding and marshalling of historical materials which Thackeray himself had been almost the first to practise, and in which he has never been surpassed. Scott had set the example, not too well followed, of acquiring a pretty thorough familiarity with the history and no small one with the literature of the time of his story; and he had accidentally or purposely brought in a good deal of local and other knowledge. But he had not made the display of this latter by any means a rule, and he had some-

times notoriously neglected it. Nor did anybody till Thackeray himself make it a point of honour to search the localities, to acquire all manner of small details from guide-books and county histories and the like, to work in scraps of colour and keeping from newspapers and novels and pamphlets. Dickens, it is true, had already done something of the kind in reference to his own style of fiction; but Dickens as has been said was only a historical novelist by accident, and he was at no time a bookish man. The new, or at least the improved practice was of course open to the same danger as that which wrecked the labours of the ingenious Mr Strutt; and it was doubtless for this reason that Scott in the prefatory discussion to *The Betrothed* made "the Preses" sit upon the expostulations of Dr Dryasdust and his desire that "Lhuyd had been consulted." Too great attention to veracity and propriety of detail is very apt to stifle the story by overlaying it. Still the practice when in strong and cunning hands no doubt adds much to the attraction of the novel; and it is scarcely necessary to say more than that all the better historical novelists for the last sixty years have followed Thackeray, and that Thackeray himself by no means improbably took a hint from Macaulay's practice in history itself.

Another innovation of Thackeray's, or at least an alteration so great as almost to be an invention, was that adjustment of the whole narrative and style to the period of the story of which *Esmond* is the capital and hitherto unapproached example. Scott, as we have seen, had, by force rather of creative genius than of elaborate study, devised a narrative style which, with very slight alterations in the dialogue, would do for any age. But he had not tried much to model the vehicle of any particular story strictly to the language and

temper of that story's time. Dumas had followed him with a still greater tendency to general modernisation. Scott's English followers had very rarely escaped the bastard and intolerable jargon of the stage. But Thackeray in *Esmond* did really clothe the thought of the mid-nineteenth century (for the thought is after all of the nineteenth century) in the language of the early eighteenth with such success as had never been seen before and such as I doubt will never be seen again. It must be admitted that the result, though generally, is not universally approved. I have known it urged by persons whose opinions are not to be lightly discredited, that the book is after all something of a *tour de force*, that there is an irksome constraint and an unnatural air about it, and that, effective as a falsetto may be, it never can be so really satisfactory as a native note. We need not argue this out. It is perhaps best, though there be a little confession and avoidance in the evasion, to adopt or extend the old joke of Condé or Charles the Second, and wish heartily that those who find fault with *Esmond* as falsetto would, in falsetto or out of it, give us anything one-twentieth part as good.

For the merits of that wonderful book, though they may be set off and picked out by its manner and style, are in the main independent thereof. The incomparable character of Beatrix Esmond, the one complete woman of English prose fiction, would more than suffice to make any book a masterpiece. And it would not be difficult to show that the historical novel no less than the novel generally may claim her. But the points of the book which, if not historical in the sense of having actually happened, are historic-fictitious,—the entry of Thomas Lord Castlewood and his injured Viscountess on their ancestral home, the duel of Frank Esmond

and Mohun, the presentation of the Gazette by General Webb to his Commander-in-Chief at point of sword, and the immortal scene in the turret chamber with James the Third—are all of the very finest stamp possible, as good as the best of Scott and better than the best of Dumas. In a certain way *Esmond* is the crown and flower of the historical novel; "the flaming limits of the world" of fiction have been reached in it with safety to the bold adventurer, but with an impossibility of progress further to him or to any other.

One scene in the unequal and, I think, rather unfairly abused sequel,—the scene where Harry fails to recognise Beatrix's youthful protrait,—is the equal of any in *Esmond*, but this is not of the strictly or specially historical kind. And indeed the whole of *The Virginians*, though there is plenty of local colour and no lack of historical personages, is distinctly less historical than its forerunner. It is true that both time and event so far as History goes, are much less interesting; and I have never been able to help thinking that the author was consciously or unconsciously hampered by a desire to please both Englishmen and Americans. But whatever the cause may be it is certain that the historical element is far less strong in *The Virginians* than in *Esmond*, and that such interest as it has is the interest of the domestic novel, the novel of manners, the novel of character, rather than of the novel of history.

Esmond was published in 1852. Before the next twelve-month was out *Hypatia* appeared, and it was followed within two years more by *Westward Ho!* In one respect and perhaps in more than one, these two brilliant books could not challenge comparison with even weaker work of Thackeray's than *Esmond*. Neither in knowledge of human nature, nor (still less) in power of projecting the results of that knowledge

into the creation of character, nor in the adjustment to sequence of the minor and major events of life, was Kingsley the equal of his great contemporary. But as has been sufficiently pointed out, the most consummate command of character in its interior working is not necessary to the historical novelist. And in the gifts which are necessary to that novelist, Kingsley was very strong indeed,—not least so in that gift of adapting the novel of the past to the form and pressure of the present, which if not a necessary, and indeed sometimes rather a treacherous and questionable advantage, is undoubtedly an advantage in its way. He availed himself of this last to an unwise extent perhaps in drawing the Raphael of *Hypatia*, just as in *Westward Ho!* he gave vent to some of the anti-Papal feelings of his day to an extent sufficient to make him in more recent days furiously unpopular with Roman Catholic critics, who have not always honestly avowed the secret of their depreciation. Nay, I have recently[1] heard, with almost incredulous amusement, that some younger critics who sympathise with Liberalism in the form into which Mr Gladstone brought it, are so shocked and disgusted at Kingsley's opinions that they can hardly read his work. This is sufficiently odd to me: for others of these opinions are quite as opposite to mine, and I never found the opposition interfere in the very least with my own enjoyment.

But the solid as well as original merits of these two books are such as cannot possibly be denied by any fair criticism which takes them as novels and not as something else. The flame which had not yet cleared itself of smoke in the earlier efforts of *Alton Locke* and *Yeast*, which was to flicker, and alternate bright with dimmer intervals, in *Two Years Ago* and *Hereward the*

[1] 1895.

Wake, blazed with astonishing brilliancy in both. I think I have read *Westward Ho!* the oftener; but I hardly know which I like the better. No doubt if Kingsley has escaped in *Hypatia* the curious curse which seems to rest on the classical-historical novel, it is by something not unlike one of those tricks whereby Our Lady and the Saints outwit Satan in legend. Not only is there much more of the thought and sentiment of the middle of the nineteenth century than of the beginning of the fifth, but the very antiquities and local colour of the time itself are a good deal advanced and made to receive much of the mediæval touch which, as we have observed, is in possible keeping with the modern, rather than of that elder spirit from which we are so helplessly divided.

But this is a perfectly legitimate stratagem and the success of it is wonderful. If no figure (except perhaps the slightly sketched one of Pelagia) is of the first order for actual life, not one falls below the second, which, let it be observed, is a very high class for the creations of fiction. The action never fails or makes a fault; the dialogue, if a little mannered and literary now and then, is always crisp and full of pulse. But the splendid tableaux of which the book is full, tableaux artfully and even learnedly composed but thoroughly alive, make the great charm and the great merit of it as a historical novel. The voyage down the Nile; the night riots and the harrying of the Jews; the panorama (I know no other word for it, but the thing is one of the finest in fiction), of the defeat of Heraclian; the scene in the theatre at Alexandria; the murder of Hypatia and the vengeance of the Goths;—all of these are not only bad to beat but in their own way, like all thoroughly good things, they cannot be beaten. Not that the book in the least degree drags between them. On

the contrary the reader is carried on from start to finish as he never is save in the best books. But I think these tableaux, these "broads" if we may say so, of the stream of story, are the triumph of it; and if I were a Crœsus I should have one of the halls of my Palace of Art exclusively and completely frescoed with scenes from *Hypatia*.

The attractions of *Westward Ho!* are less pictorial than those of its forerunner, which exceeds almost any novel that I know in this respect; but they are even more strictly historic and more closely connected with historical action. Minute accuracy was never Kingsley's *forte*; and here, though rather less than elsewhere, he laid himself open to the cavils of the enemy. But on the whole, if not in detail, he had acquired a more than competent knowledge of Elizabethan thought and sentiment, and had grasped the action and passion of the time with thorough and appreciative sympathy. He had moreover thoroughly imbued himself with the spirit of the regions over sea which he was to describe, and he had a mighty action or series of actions, real or feigned, for his theme. The result was once more what may fairly be called a masterpiece. There is again perhaps only one character, Salvation Yeo, who is distinctly of the first class as a character; for Amyas is a little too typical, a little too much of the Happy Warrior who has one temptation and overcomes it. Frank (the enemy may say and there may be some difficulty in gainsaying him) is mawkish; Rose a doll; Don Guzman a famous "portrait of a Spaniard" caped and sworded duly; Ayacanora any savage princess. But even these go through their motions quite satisfactorily; and all the minor characters from Cary and Jack downward among the fictitious, from Sir Richard Grenvile among the real, are as good as any reasonable person can

desire. And once more, though with the slight change above noticed, the separate acts and scenes hurry the reader along in the most admirable fashion. From the day when Amyas finds the horn to the day when he flings away the sword (a quaint, but of course not intentional, reminder of the old ballad) the chronicle goes on with step as light as it is steady, with interest as well maintained as it is intense. What anybody likes best will depend on idiosyncrasy. Only, if he knows a good historical novel, and one of the very best possible, when he sees it, if he is not uncritically deterred by differences in religion and politics, in nationality and literature, he must like *Westward Ho!* There is no hope for him in this particular if he does not. He may be a very good man: he may be a very good judge of other novels; but he does not know a historical novel when he sees it.

It may seem odd that after the appearance of three such books in little more than three years the style which they represented should have lost popularity. But such was the fact for reasons partly assigned already, and similar phenomena are by no means uncommon in literary history. For the best part of twenty years the historical novel was a little out of fashion. How it revived with Mr Blackmore's masterpiece, and how it has since been taken up with ever increasing zest, everybody knows. But some one other than the present writer must take up the history of what is still among the youngest,—though it has been trying to be born ever since a time which would have made it quite the eldest—of the kinds of Prose Fiction.

II

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE [1876]

In the days when I had to study the two great Histories of Greece which England produced in the eighteenth century, a thought, which has most probably often presented itself to other students, frequently occurred to me. Much as the two works differ in plan, in views, and in manner of execution, their difference never struck me so much as in the point of style. And the remarkable feature of this difference is, that it is not by any means the natural variation which we allow for, and indeed expect, in the productions of any two men of decided and distinct literary ability. It is not as the difference between Hume and Gibbon, or the difference between Clarendon and Taylor. In the styles of these great writers, and in those of many others, there is the utmost conceivable diversity; but at the same time they are all styles. We can see (we see it, indeed, so clearly that we hardly take the trouble to think about it) that each of them made a distinct effort to arrange his words into their clause, his clauses into their sentence, and his sentences into their paragraph according to certain forms, and that though these forms varied in the subtle and indescribable measure of the taste and idiosyncrasy of each writer, the effort was always present, and was only accidentally if inseparably connected with the intention to express certain thoughts, to describe certain facts, or to present certain characters. But when we come to compare Thirlwall with Grote, we find not a variation of the kind just mentioned, but the full opposition of the presence of style on the one hand and the absence of it on the other. The late Bishop of

St David's will probably never be cited among the greatest masters of English prose style, but still we can see without difficulty that he has inherited its traditions. It would be difficult, on the other hand, to persuade a careful critic that Grote ever thought of such things as the cadence of a sentence or the composition of a paragraph. That he took so much trouble as might suffice to make his meaning clear and his language energetic is obvious; that in no case did he look beyond this is, I think, certain.

But the difference between these two great historians is very far from being a mere isolated fact. It marks with extraordinary precision the date and nature of a change which has affected English literature to a degree and in a manner worthy of the most serious consideration. What this change is, and whether it amounts to an actual decay or to a mere temporary neglect of style in English prose writing, are questions which are certainly of importance, and the answers to which should not, as it seems to me, lack interest.

If, then, we take up almost any book of the eighteenth century, we shall find that within varying limits the effort of which I have just spoken is distinctly present. The model upon which the writer frames his style may be and probably is faulty in itself, and still more probably is faultily copied; there may be too much Addison in the mixture, or too much Johnson; but still we shall see that an honest attempt at style, an honest endeavour at manner as apart from matter, has been made, however clumsy the attempt may be, and however far short of success it may fall. But if we take up any book of the mid-nineteenth, save a very few, the first thing that will strike us is the total absence of any attempt or endeavour of the kind. The matter will, as a rule, have been more or less carefully

attended to, and will be presented to the reader with varying degrees of clearness and precision. But the manner, except in so far as certain peculiarities of manner may be conducive or prejudicial to clearness and precision of statement—sometimes perhaps to apparent precision with any sacrifice of clearness—will in most cases be found to have been totally neglected, if a thing may be said to be neglected which does not appear to have even presented itself within the circumference of the field of view. In other words, and to adopt a convenient distinction, though there may be a difference of manner, there is usually no difference of style, for there is no style at all.

Before going any further, it may be well to follow a commendable, if antiquated and scholastic practice, and to set down accurately what is here meant by style, and of what it consists. Style is the choice and arrangement of language with only a subordinate regard to the meaning to be conveyed. Its parts are the choice of the actual words to be used, the further selection and juxtaposition of these words, the structure of the clauses into which they are wrought, the arrangement of the clauses into sentences, and the composition of the sentences into paragraphs. Beyond the paragraph style can hardly be said to go, but within that limit it is supreme. The faults incident to these parts (if I may be allowed still to be scholastic) are perhaps also worthy of notice. Every one can see, though every one is by no means careful to put his knowledge into practice, that certain words are bad of themselves, and certain others to be avoided wherever possible. The next stage introduces difficulties of a higher order, though these also are more or less elementary, such as combination of incongruous notions and unintentional repetitions of the same word. But these are

mere rudiments; it is in the breach or neglect of the rules that govern the structure of clauses, of sentences, and of paragraphs that the real secret of style consists, and to illustrate this breach or observation is less easy. The task will be perhaps made easier if we consider first, in the rough, how the prevalent English style of the present day differs from that of past times.

De Quincey, when the century was not yet at the midmost of its way, had already noticed and deplored the deterioration of which we speak. In his Essay on Style more particularly, as well as in other places, he undertakes to discuss at some length the symptoms and causes of the disease. Now De Quincey, as any one who is at all acquainted with his works is aware, gave considerable attention to the subject of style, and professed to be no mean authority thereon. There were, indeed, two peculiarities about him which prevented him from deserving the highest place as a referee on such matters. The first was his mistaken idea that extremely ornate prose—the prose which his ally John Wilson called "numerous," and which others have called Asiatic—was the highest form attainable, and that any writer who did not aim at this fell naturally into a lower class. The other was his singular crotchetiness, which made him frequently refuse to see any good in the style of writers to whom, for some reason or for no reason, he had taken a dislike. It will probably be allowed, not merely by persons who hold traditional opinions, but by all independent students of literature, that we must look with considerable distrust on the dicta of a critic who finds fault with the styles of Plato and of Conyers Middleton[1]. The Essay on Style, however (at least its first part, for the latter

[1] I have kept this name out of honesty. But it is very many years since I disjoined it from the other (1923).

portions go off into endless digressions of no pertinence whatever), is much more carefully written and much more carefully reasoned than most of De Quincey's work. The purport of it is, that the decay of style is to be attributed chiefly to the prevalence of journalism. No one will deny that the influence of newspaper writing is in many ways bad, and that to it is due much of the decadence in style of which complaint is made. But either the prevalent manner of journalism has undergone a remarkable change during the past generation, or else the particular influence which De Quincey supposes it to have had was mistaken by him. I do not myself pretend to a very intimate acquaintance with the periodical literature of the second quarter of the century, and I am afraid that not even in the pursuit of knowledge could I be tempted to plunge into such a dreary and unbuoyant *mare mortuum*[1]. With respect to the papers of to-day it is certainly not difficult to discern some peculiarities in their styles, or in what does duty for style in them. But in most of all this we shall find little to bear out De Quincey's verdict. Long and involved sentences, unduly stuffed with fact and meaning, are what he complains of; and though there is no doubt that we should not have to go far in order to find such at the present day, yet it does not appear, to me at least, that the main fault of contemporary English style is of this kind. On the contrary, the sin of which I should chiefly complain is the sin of over-short sentences, of mere gasps instead of balanced periods. Such a paragraph as the following will illustrate what I mean: "That request was obeyed by the massacre of six out of the surviving princes of the imperial family. Two alone escaped. With such a mingling of light and darkness did Constantine close

[1] But I had to do so, later! (1923).

his career." I think that any one who considers this combination of two mutilated clauses with an interjectional copula, and who perceives with what ease its hideous cacophony might have been softened into a complete and harmonious sentence, must feel certain that its present form is to some extent intentional. The writer might very well have written: "That request was obeyed by the massacre of six out of the eight surviving princes of the imperial family, and the career of Constantine was closed in a mixture of light and darkness." Why did he not?

Again, let us take a book of recent [1876] date, whose style has received considerable praise both in England and abroad—Mr Green's *Short History of the English People*. The character of Elizabeth is perhaps the most carefully written, certainly the most striking, passage in the book, and contains a most elaborate statement of that view of the great queen which many historical students now take. It enforces this view with the greatest energy, and sets it before us in every detail and difference of light and shade. But how inartistic it is! how thoroughly bad in conception, composition, and style! In the first place it occupies some seven printed pages of unusual extent and closeness, each of which is at least equal to two of the ordinary octavo pages of an English classic author. Let any one, if he can, imagine one of the great masters who could both draw and compose—Hume or Chesterfield[1], Clarendon or Swift—giving us a character of fourteen pages. A portrait on the scale of Brobdingnag, with all features and all defects unnaturally emphasised and enlarged, could hardly be more disgusting[2].

[1] "Middleton" again in original. I cannot think what I was about! (1923).

[2] I cannot refrain from noticing an instance from this writer of the absurdity into which the passion for picturesque epithet betrays many

It is not necessary to multiply examples, which, if all the defects of contemporary style were to be noticed and illustrated, would occupy a space longer than the present chapter. In all but a very few writers we shall observe with certain variations the same defects—inordinate copiousness of treatment combined with an utter inability, or at best an extreme unwillingness, to frame a sentence of due proportion and careful structure. It should certainly be possible to trace the origin and examine the nature of a phenomenon so striking and so universal.

The secret of the manner will not long escape us if we notice or can disengage the intention with which, willingly or unwillingly, this manner has been adopted. Nor is this intention very hard to discover. It is, as it appears to me, a desire to present the subject, whatever it may be, to the reader in the most striking and arresting fashion. The attention of the reading public generally has, from causes to be presently noticed, become gradually concentrated almost wholly upon subject-matter. Among what may be called, intellectually speaking, the lower classes, this concentration shows itself not in the preference but in the exclusive study of novels, newspapers, and sometimes of so-called books of information. A book must be, as they say, "about something," or it fails altogether to arrest their attention. To such persons a page with (as it has been quaintly put) no "resting-places," no proper names and capital letters to fix the eye, is an intolerable

contemporary authors. At Newbury, we are told, "the London train bands flung Rupert's horsemen *roughly* off their front of pikes." Here *roughly* is in the Polonian sense "good." Visions of the sturdy and pious citizen discomfiting the debauched cavalier are aroused. But let us consider it with the sobriety proper to history and to art, and perhaps we shall ask Mr Green to show us how to fling an enemy *softly* off a pike. Roaring like a sucking-dove would be nothing to this gymnastic effort. [It is now (1892 and still more in 1923) unfortunately impossible to ask him. But the instance is too characteristic to be omitted.]

weariness, and to them it is evident that style can be only a name. Somewhat above them come the (intellectually) middle classes. They are not absolutely confined to personal adventure, real or fictitious, or to interesting facts. They can probably enjoy the better class of magazine articles, superior biographies, travels, and the other books that everybody reads and nobody buys. This class will even read poetry if the poet's name be known, and would consider it a grave affront if it were hinted to them that their appreciation of style is but dull and faulty. A certain amount of labour is therefore required on work which is to please these readers: labour, however, which is generally bestowed in a wrong direction, on ornament and trick rather than on really artistic construction and finish. Lastly there is the highest class of all, consisting of those who really possess, or might possess, taste, culture, and intellect. Of these the great majority are now somewhat alienated from pure literature, and devoted rather to social matters, to science, or to the more fashionable and profitable arts of design. Their demand for style in literature is confined chiefly to poetry. They also are interested more by their favourite subjects treated anyhow, than by subjects for which they care little treated well, so that even by them little encouragement is given to the cultivation and little hindrance to the decay of prose style.

Intimately connected with the influences that arise from this attitude and temper of the general reader, are some other influences which spring from such prevalent forms and subjects of literature as present themselves to the general writer. The first of these forms, and unquestionably the most constant and pervading in its influence, is now, as it was in De Quincey's days, journalism. No one with the slightest

knowledge of the subject will pretend that the influence of journalism upon writing is wholly bad. Whatever may have been the case formerly, a standard of excellence which is in some respects really high is usually aimed at, and not seldom reached, in the better class of newspapers. Some appropriateness in the use of words, a rigid avoidance of the more glaring grammatical errors, and a respectable degree of clearness in statement, are expected by the reader and usually observed by the writer. In these respects, therefore, there is no falling off to be complained of, but rather a marked improvement upon past times to be perceived. Yet, as regards the higher excellences of style, it is not possible that the influence of journalism should be good. For it must at any cost be rapid, and rapidity is absolutely incompatible with style. The journalist has as a rule one of two things to do; he has either to give a rapid account of certain facts, or to present a rapid discussion of certain arguments. In either case it becomes a matter of necessity for him to adopt stereotyped phrases and forms of speech which, being ready cut and dried, may abbreviate his labour and leave him as little as possible to invent in his limited time. Now there is nothing more fatal to the attainment of a good style than the habit of using such stereotyped phrases and forms. With the imperiousness natural to all art, style absolutely refuses to avail itself of, or to be found in company with, anything that is ready made. The rule must be a leaden one, the mould made for the occasion, and broken after it has passed. Every one who has ever seriously tried to write must be conscious how sorely he has been beset, and how often he has been overcome, by the almost insensible temptation to adopt the current phrases of the day. Bad, however, as the influence of journalism

is in this respect, it is perhaps worse in its tendency to sacrifice everything to mere picturesqueness of style (for the word must be thus misused because there is no other). The journalist is bound to be picturesque by the law of his being. The old phrase, *segnius irritant*, is infinitely truer of pseudo-picturesque style as compared with literature which holds to its proper means of appeal, than it is of literal spectacle as compared with narrative. And the journalist is obliged at any cost *irritare animos*, and that in the least possible time.

This tendency of journalism is assisted and intensified by that of another current form of literature, novel-writing. A very little thought will show that if the novel-writer attains to style it is almost a marvel. Of the four constituent elements of the novel,—plot, character, description, and dialogue,—none lend themselves in any great degree to the cultivation of the higher forms of style, and some are distinctly opposed to it. The most cunning plot may be developed equally in the style of Plato and in the style of a penny dreadful. Character drawing, as the novelist understands or should understand it, is almost equally unconnected with style. On the other hand, description and dialogue, unless managed with consummate skill, distinctly tend to develop and strengthen the crying faults of contemporary style: its picturesqueness at any cost, its grasping and ungraceful periods, its neglect of purely literary effect.

Lastly, there must be noticed the enormous influence necessarily exerted by the growth of what is called scientific study (to use the term in its largest and widest sense), and by the displacement in its favour of many, if not most, of the departments of literature which were most favourable to the cultivation of style. In whatever quarter we look, we shall see that the primary

effort of the writer and the primary desire of the reader are both directed to what are called scientific or positive results, in other words, to matter instead of manner. In using the word *science* here, I have not the slightest intention of limiting its meaning, as it is too often limited, to physical science. I extend it to every subject which is capable of being treated in a scientific way. And I think we shall find that all subjects and all kinds of prose literature which are not capable of this sort of treatment, or do not readily lend themselves to it, are yearly occupying less and less the attention of both artists and audiences. Parliamentary oratory of the elaborate kind, which furnished a vigorous if a somewhat dangerous stimulant to the cultivation of style, is dead utterly. Pulpit eloquence, which at its worst maintained "stylistic" traditions, and at its best furnished some of the noblest examples of style, is dying, partly owing to the gradual divorce between the best men of the universities and the clerical profession, partly to the absence of the serene security of a settled doctrine and position, but most of all to the demands upon the time of the clergy which modern notions enforce, and which make it utterly impossible for the greater number to devote a proper time to study. Philosophy, another great nurse of style, has now turned stepmother, and turns out her nurselings to wander in "thorniest queaches" of terminology and jargon, instead of the ordered gardens wherein Plato and Berkeley walked. History even, the last or almost the last refuge of a decent and comely prose, is more busy about records and manuscripts than about periods and paragraphs. Only criticism, the youngest and most hopeful birth of time as far as prose style is concerned, has not yet openly apostatized. It is true that even here signs of danger are not wanting, and

that already we are told that criticism must be scientific, that its reading must not be desultory, and so forth. But on the whole there is little fear of relapse. The man who would cut himself a coat from another's cloth must bring to the task the care and labour of a skilled fashioner if he is to make good his claim of ownership. The man who has good work in perpetual contemplation is not likely to be satisfied with the complacent production of what is bad.

There is, moreover, one influence, or rather one set of influences, hostile to the attainment of style in the present day which I have as yet left unnoticed, and the approach to which is guarded by ground somewhat dangerous to the tread. It will, I think, appear to any one who contemplates the subject fully and impartially that style is essentially an aristocratic thing; and it is already a commonplace to say that the spirit of to-day, or perhaps the spirit of the times immediately behind us, is essentially democratic. It is democratic not in any mere political sense, but in the intolerance with which it regards anything out of the reach of, or incomprehensible to, the ordinary Philistine, working by the methods of Philistia. Intellectual and artistic pre-eminence, except in so far as it ministers to the fancies of the vulgar (great or small), is perhaps especially the object of this intolerance. Every one has witnessed or shared the angry impatience with which the ordinary Briton resents anything esoteric, fastidious, or fine. And the charms of prose style especially merit these epithets, and are not to be read by any one who runs, or tasted by any one who swallows in haste. Gaudy ornament is intelligible, "graphic" drawing is intelligible; but the finer cadences of the period, the more intricate strokes of composition, fall unregarded on the common ear and pass unnoticed by the common

eye. To be tickled, to be dazzled, to be harrowed, are impressions of which the uncultured man is capable; they require little intellectual effort, and scarcely any judgment or taste in the direction of that little. But the music of the spheres would form but a sorry attraction in a music-hall programme, and Christopher Sly is not willing to accept nectar in exchange for a pot of even the smallest ale. And if the angry resentment of not a few readers gives the votary of style but little chance of an audience, it must be admitted that the lack of what I have called an aristocratic spirit gives the audience little chance of a performer. The conditions of modern life are unfavourable to the attainment of the peculiar mood of somewhat arrogant indifference which is the characteristic of the scholar. Every one knows Dean Gaisford's three reasons for the cultivation of the Greek language; and I for my part have no doubt that one of them most accurately describes an important feature of the *Wesen des Gelehrten*. It may not be necessary for him "to read the words of Christ in the original"; it may not be of absolute importance that he should "have situations of affluence opened to him." But it certainly is essential that he should "look down on his fellow-creatures from a proper elevation"; and this is what the tendency of modern social progress is making more and more difficult, at any rate in appearance. You cannot raise the level of the valleys without diminishing the relative height of the hills; and you cannot scatter education and elementary cultivation broadcast without diminishing the value of the privileges which appertain to superior culture. The old republic of letters was, like other old republics, a democracy only in name, but in reality a more or less close oligarchy, looking down on metics and slaves whose degradations and dis-

abilities heightened its courage and gave a zest to its freedom. In letters, as in politics, we are doing our best to change all this; and the possible result may be, that every one will soon be able to write a newspaper article, and that no one will aspire to anything beyond[1].

The general characteristics of style which the influence, combined or partial, of these forces has produced have been already indicated, but may perhaps now be summed up. Diffuseness; sacrifice of the graces of literary proportion to real or apparent clearness of statement; indulgence in cut-and-dried phrases; undue aiming at pictorial effect; gaudiness of unnatural ornament; preference of gross and glaring effects *en bloc* to careful composition. Certain authors who are either free from these defects, or have vigour enough to excuse or transform them, must now be noticed.

For reasons obvious, though various, it is not my intention to discuss in any way at the present time the style of the author of *Sartor Resartus*. Mr Carlyle being thus removed, there can be little question who must take the foremost place in a discussion as to the merits and demerits of modern English prose style. And yet, it is at least doubtful whether in strictness we can assign to Mr Ruskin a position in the very highest rank of writers if we are to adopt style as a criterion. The objection to his manner of writing is an obvious one, and one which he might very likely take as a compliment; it is too spontaneous in the first place, and

[1] I have for the present thought it better to leave out of consideration the probable effect of the diminished study of classics in modern school and university education. That this effect is decidedly adverse to the cultivation of style is sufficiently obvious, but the subject is too complicated to be incidentally treated, and perhaps the diminution itself is too recent for its effects to have been as yet much felt. [They have made themselves much more sensible in the nearly fifty years which have passed since this article was written. (1923.)]

too entirely subordinate to the subject in the second. I hope that it may be very clearly understood that I can see passages in his works which, for splendour of imaginative effect, for appropriateness of diction, for novelty and grandeur of conception, stand beyond all chance of successful rivalry, almost beyond all hope of decent parallel among the writings of ancient and modern masters. But in most cases this marvellous effect will, when carefully examined, be found to depend on something wholly or partially extrinsic to the style. Mr Ruskin writes beautifully because he thinks beautifully, because his thoughts spring, like Pallas, ready armed, and the fashion of the armour costs him nothing. Everybody has heard of the unlucky critic whose comment on Scott's fertility was that "the invention was not to be counted, for that came to him of its own accord." So it is with Mr Ruskin. His beauties of style "come to him of their own accord," and then he writes as the very gods might dream of writing. But in the moments when he is off the tripod, or is upon some casual and un-Delphic tripod of his own construction or selection, how is his style altered! The strange touches of unforeseen colour become splashed and gaudy, the sonorous roll of the prophetic sentence-paragraphs drags and wriggles like a wounded snake, the cunning interweaving of scriptural or poetic phrase is patched and seamy. A Balaam on the Lord's side, he cannot curse or bless but as it is revealed to him, whereas the possessor of a great style can use it at will. He can shine on the just and on the unjust; can clothe his argument for tyranny or for liberty, for virtue or for vice, with the same splendour of diction, and the same unperturbed perfection of manner; can convince us, carry us with him, or leave us unconvinced but admiring, with the same

unquestioned supremacy and the same unruffled calm. Swift can write a *jeu d'esprit* and a libel on the human race, a political pamphlet and a personal lampoon, with the same felicity and the same vigour. Berkeley can present tar-water and the Trinity, the theory of vision and the follies of contemporary free-thinking, with the same perfect lucidity and the same colourless fairness. But with Mr Ruskin all depends on the subject, and the manner in which the subject is to be treated. He cannot even blame as he can praise; and there must be many who are ready to accept everything he can say of Tintoret or of Turner, and who feel no call to object to any of his strictures on Canaletto or on Claude, who yet perceive painfully the difference of style in the panegyrist and the detractor, and who would demand the stricter if less obvious justice, and the more artistic if apparently perverted sensitiveness, of the thorough master of style.

But if we have to quarrel with Mr Ruskin because he has not sufficient command of the unquestioned beauties of his style, because he is not, in Carew's words—

> A king who rules as he thinks fit
> The universal monarchy of wit,

but is rather a slave to his own thoughts and fancies, a very opposite fault must be found with the next writer who falls to be mentioned. "We do not," it was once said of him, "we do not get angry so much with what Mr Matthew Arnold says as with his insufferable manner of saying it." In other words, there is no fear of omitting to notice a deliberate command and peculiarity of manner in Mr Arnold, whether that manner be considered "insufferable" or no. For myself I must confess, that I could very frequently find it in my heart to wish that Mr Arnold had chosen

any other style than that which appeared to afford him such extreme delight. Irony is an admirable thing, but it must be grave and not grimacing. Innocence is an admirable thing, but it should not be affected. To have a manner of one's own is an admirable thing, but to have a mannerism of one's own is perhaps not quite so admirable. It is curious that his unfortunately successful pursuit of this latter possession should have led Mr Arnold to adopt a style which has more than any other the fault he justly censured many years ago as the special vice of modern art—the fault of the *fantastic*. No doubt the great masters of style have each a *cachet* which is easily decipherable by a competent student; no doubt, in spite of Lord Macaulay, Arbuthnot is to be distinguished from Swift, and the cunningest imitators of Voltaire from Voltaire himself. But to simulate this distinction by the deliberate adoption of mere tricks and manners is what no true master of style ever yet attempted, because for no true master of style was it ever yet necessary. Mr Ruskin, to use the old Platonic simile, has not his horses sufficiently well in hand; at times the heavenly steed, with a strong and sudden flight, will lift the car amid the empyrean, at times the earth-born yoke-fellow will drag it down, with scarcely the assistance and scarcely the impediment of the charioteer. But even this is better than the driving of one who has broken his horses, indeed, but has broken them to little but mincing graces.

It is not possible to speak with equal definiteness of the style of a third master of English prose, who ranks in point of age and of reputation with Mr Ruskin and Mr Arnold. It would certainly be an over-hasty or an ill-qualified critic who should assert that Mr Froude's style is always faultless; but, on the other hand, it

may be asserted, without any fear whatever of contradiction carrying weight, that at its best it is surpassed by no style of the present day, and by few of any other, and that at its worst its faults are—not of a venial character, for no fault in art is venial, but at any rate—of a kind which may meet with more ready excuse than those of the writers previously noticed. These faults are perhaps two only—undue diffuseness and undue aiming at the picturesque. We have seen that these are the two most glaring faults of the age, and by his indulgence in them, and the splendid effects which he has produced by that indulgence, Mr Froude has undoubtedly earned his place, if not as a *Säcularischer Mensch*, at any rate as a representative man. No one, perhaps, who has read can fail to count among the triumphs of English prose the descriptions of the Pilgrimage of Grace in the *History*, of Sir Richard Grenvile's last fight in the *Short Studies*, of the wreckers at Ballyhige in the *English in Ireland*. There are also many shorter passages which exhibit almost every excellence that the most exacting critic could demand. But it is not to be denied that Mr Froude has very frequently bowed the knee before the altar of Baal. It is unlawful to occupy twelve mighty volumes with the history of one nation during little more than half a century; it is unlawful for the sound critical reason of St John, that if such a practice obtained universally, the world could not contain the books that should be written; and also for the reason that in such writing it is almost impossible to observe the reticence and compression which are among the lamps of style. It is unlawful to imagine and set down, except very sparingly, the colour of which the trees probably were at the time when kings and queens made their entrance into such and such a city, the buildings

which they may or may not have looked upon, the thoughts which may or may not have occurred to them. Such sacrificings at the shrine of effect, such trespassings on the domains and conveying of the methods of other arts and alien muses, are not to be commended or condoned. But one must, at the same time, allow with the utmost thankfulness that there are whole paragraphs, if not whole pages, of Mr Froude's, which, for practised skill of composition and for legitimate beauty of effect, may take their place among the proudest efforts of English art.

It will probably be agreed that the three writers whom I have noticed stand at the head of contemporary English prose authors in point of age and authority; but there are other and younger authors who must necessarily be noticed in any account of the subject which aims at completeness. Mr Swinburne's progress as a prose writer can hardly have failed to be a subject of interest, almost equally with his career as a poet, to every lover of our tongue. His earliest appearance, the Essay on Byron, is even now in many respects characteristic of his work; but it does not contain—and it is a matter of sincere congratulation for all lovers of English prose that it does not contain—any passage at all equal to the magnificent descant on Marlowe which closes its ten years younger brother, the Essay on Chapman. In the work between and since these two limits, the merits and defects of Mr Swinburne as a prose writer may be read by whoso wills. At times it has seemed as if the weeds would grow up with the good seed and choke it. Mr Swinburne has fallen into the error, not unnatural for a poet, of forgetting that the figures and the language allowable in poetry are not also allowable in prose. The dangerous luxury of alliteration has attracted him only too often, and the

still more dangerous licence of the figure called chiasmus has been to him even as a siren, from whose clutches he has been hardly saved. But the noticeable thing is that the excellences of his prose speech have grown ever stronger and its weaknesses weaker since he began. In the Essay on Blake, admirable as was much thereof, a wilful waste of language not unfrequently verging on a woful want of sense was too frequently apparent. In the Notes on his *Poems*, and in *Under the Microscope*, just as was most of the counter-criticism, it was impossible not to notice a tendency to verbiage and a proneness, I will not say to prefer sound to sense, but unnecessarily to reinforce sense with sound. But at the same time, in the *Essays and Studies*, and the Essay on Chapman, no competent critic could fail to notice, notwithstanding occasional outbreaks, the growing reticence and severity of form, as well as the increasing weight and dignity of meaning. Mr Swinburne, as a prose writer, is in need of nothing but the pruning-hook. Most of his fellows are in want chiefly of something which might be worth pruning.

It is obviously impossible in the present essay to notice minutely all even of the more prominent names in contemporary prose. Some there are among the older of our writers who yet retain the traditions of the theological school of writing, to which style owes so much. A good deal might be said of Cardinal Manning's earlier style (for his progress in this hierarchy hardly corresponded with his promotion in the other), as well as of Dr Newman's admirable clearness and form, joined as it is, perhaps unavoidably, to a certain hardness of temper. Mr Disraeli's peculiarities in style would almost demand an essay to themselves. They have never perhaps had altogether fair-play; for novel-writing and politics are scarcely friends to style. But

Mr Disraeli had the root of the matter in him, and never was guilty of the degradation of the sentence, which is the crying sin of modern prose; while his unequalled felicity in the selection of single epithets gave him a supply of legitimate ornament which few writers have ever had at command. Tastes, I suppose, will always differ as to the question whether his ornamentation was not sometimes illegitimate. The parrot-cry of upholstery is easily raised. But I think we have at last come to see that rococo work is good and beautiful in its way, and he must be an ungrateful critic who objects to the somewhat lavish emeralds and rubies of the *Arabian Nights*. Of younger writers, there are not many whose merits it would be proper to specify in this place; while the prevailing defects of current style have been already fully noticed. But there is one book of recent appearance which sets the possibilities of modern English prose in the most favourable light, and gives the liveliest hope as to what may await us if writers, duly heeding the temptations to which they are exposed, and duly availing themselves of the opportunities for study and imitation which are at their disposal, should set themselves seriously to work to develop *pro virili* the prose resources of the English tongue. Of the merely picturesque beauty of Mr Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, there can be no necessity for me to say anything here. In the first place it cannot escape the notice of any one who reads the book, and in the second, if there be any truth in what has been already said, the present age by no means needs to be urged to cultivate or to appreciate this particular excellence. The important point for us is the purely formal or regular merit of this style, and this is to be viewed with other eyes and tested by other methods than those which are generally brought to

bear by critics of the present day. The main point which I shall notice is the subordinate and yet independent beauty of the sentences when taken separately from the paragraph. This is a matter of the very greatest importance. In too much of our present prose the individual sentence is unceremoniously robbed of all proper form and comeliness. If it adds its straw to the heap, its duty is supposed to be done. Mr Pater has not fallen into this error, nor has he followed the multitude to do evil in the means which he has adopted for the production of the singular "sweet attractive kind of grace" which distinguishes these *Studies*. A bungler would have depended, after the fashion of the day, upon strongly coloured epithets, upon complicated and quasi-poetic cadences of phrase, at least upon an obtrusively voluptuous softness of thought and a cumbrous protraction of sentence. Not so Mr Pater. There is not to be discovered in his work the least sacrifice of the phrase to the word, of the clause to the phrase, of the sentence to the clause, of the paragraph to the sentence. Each holds its own proper place and dignity while contributing duly to the dignity and place of its superior in the hierarchy. Often the cadence of the sentence, considered separately, will seem to be—and will in truth be—quite different from that of the paragraph, because its separate completeness demands this difference. Yet the total effect, so far from being marred, is enhanced. There is no surer mark of the highest style than this separate and yet subordinate finish. In the words of Mr Ruskin, it is "so modulated that every square inch is a perfect composition."

It is this perfection of modulation to which we must look for the excellence that we require and do not meet with in most of the work of the present day, and it is

exactly this modulation with which all the faults that I have had to comment upon in the preceding pages are inconsistent. To an artist who should set before him such a model as either of the passages which I have quoted, lapses into such faults would be impossible. He will not succumb to the easy diffuseness which may obliterate the just proportion and equilibrium of his periods. He will not avail himself of the ready assistance of stereotyped phraseology to spare himself the trouble of casting new moulds and devising new patterns. He will not imagine that he is a scene painter instead of a prose writer, a decorator instead of an architect, a caterer for the desires of the many instead of a priest to the worship of the few. He will not indulge in a style which requires the maximum of ornament in order to disguise and render palatable the minimum of art and of thought. He will not consider it his duty to provide, at the least possible cost of intellectual effort on the part of the reader, something which may delude him into the idea that he is exercising his judgment and his taste. And, above all, he will be careful that his sentences have an independent completeness and harmony, no matter what purpose they may be designed to fulfil. For the sentence is the unit of style; and by the cadence and music, as well as by the purport and bearing, of his sentences, the master of style must stand or fall. For years, almost for centuries, French prose has been held up as a model to English prose writers, and for the most part justly. Only of late has the example come to have something of the Helot about it. The influence of Victor Hugo—an influence almost omnipotent among the younger generation of French literary men—has been exercised in prose with a result almost as entirely bad as its effect in verse has been good. The rules of verse had

stiffened and cramped French poetry unnaturally, and violent exercise was the very thing required to recover suppleness and strength; but French prose required no such surgery, and it has consequently lost its ordered beauty without acquiring compensatory charms. The proportions of the sentence have been wilfully disregarded, and the result is that French prose is probably now at a lower point of average merit than at any time for two centuries.

That an art should be fully recognised as an art, with strict rules and requirements, is necessary to attainment of excellence in it; and in England this recognition, which poetry has long enjoyed, has hardly yet been granted to prose. No such verses as we find by scores in such books as Marston's *Satires* would now suggest themselves as possible or tolerable to any writer of Marston's powers; but in prose many a sentence quite as intolerable as any of these verses is constantly written by persons of presumably sound education and competent wits. The necessities of the prose writer are, an ear in the first place: this is indispensable and perhaps not too common. In the second place, due study of the best authors, as well to know what to avoid as what to imitate. Lastly, care, which perhaps is not too much to demand of any artist, so soon as he has recognised and has secured recognition of the fact that he is an artist. Care is indeed the one thrice-to-be-repeated and indispensable property of the prose writer. It is pre-eminently necessary to him for the very reason that it is so easy to dispense with it, and to write prose without knowing what one does. Verse, at least verse which is to stand, as Johnson says, "the test of the finger if not of the ear," cannot be written without conscious effort and observation. But something which may be mistaken for prose can unfortunately be pro-

duced without either taste, or knowledge, or care. With these three requisites there should be no limit to the beauty and to the variety of the results obtained. The fitness of English for prose composition will hardly be questioned, though it may be contended with justice that perhaps in no other language has the average merit of its prose been so far below the excellence of its most perfect specimens. But the resources which in the very beginning of the practice of original composition in fully organised English could produce the splendid and thoughtful, if quaint and cumbrous, embroideries of *Euphues* and the linked sweetness of the *Arcadia*, which could give utterance to the symphonies of Browne and Milton, which could furnish and suffice for the matchless simplicity of Bunyan, the splendid strength of Swift, the transparent clearness of Middleton and Berkeley, the stately architecture of Gibbon, are assuredly equal to the demands of any genius that may arise to employ them.

It is therefore the plain duty of every critic to assist at least in impressing upon the mass of readers that they do not receive what they ought to receive from the mass of writers, and in suggesting a multiplication and tightening of the requirements which a prose writer must fulfil. There are some difficulties in the way of such impression and suggestion in the matter of style. It is not easy for the critic to escape being bidden, in the words of Nicholas Breton, "not to talk too much of it, having so little of it," or to avoid the obvious jest of Diderot on Beccaria, that he had written an "ouvrage sur le style où il n'y a point de style." But I know no Utopia which ought to be more speedily rendered *topic*, than that in which at least the same censure which is now incurred by a halting verse, a discordant rhyme, or a clumsy stanza, should be

accorded to a faultily-arranged clause, to a sentence of inharmonious cadence, to a paragraph of irregular and ungraceful architecture[1].

[1] There are some things in this which may seem ungraceful now. But I have kept it almost unaltered, and never altered at all without warning in important matters, because of its date. It was written but a year or two after Mr Pater's *Renaissance* had definitely sounded the horn for return to ornateness: and therefore may have some interest. (1923.)

III

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE

"The other harmony of prose."—DRYDEN

IT was once reported that Victor Hugo, whose command of his own tongue was only equalled by his ignorance of the English language and literature, gave not long before his death his opinion of the difference between French and English prose and verse. A perfect language, he opined, should show a noteworthy difference between its style in prose and its style in verse: this difference existed in French and did not exist in English. I shall give no opinion as to the truth of this axiom in general, nor any as to its application to French. But it is not inappropriate to begin an essay on the subject of English prose style by observing that, whatever may be its merits and defects, it is entirely different—different by the extent of the whole heaven of language—from English verse style. We have had writers, including some of genius, who have striven to make prose like verse; and we have had other writers, including some of genius, who have striven to make verse like prose. Both in so doing have shown themselves to be radically mistaken. The actual vocabulary of the best English style of different periods is indeed almost entirely common to verse and to prose, and it is perhaps this fact which induced the distinguished person above referred to, and others not much less distinguished, to make a mistake of confusion. The times when the mere dictionary of poetic style has been distinct from the mere dictionary of prosaic style (for there have been such) have not been those in which English literature was at its highest

point. But between the syntax—taking that word in its proper sense of the order of words—of prose and the syntax of verse; between the rhythm of prose and the rhythm of verse; between the sentence- and clause-architecture of prose and the sentence- and clause-architecture of verse, there has been since English literature took a durable form in the sixteenth century at least as strongly marked a difference in English as in other languages.

Good poets have usually been good writers of prose; but in English more than in any other tongue the prose style of these writers has differed from their verse style. The French prose and the French verse of Hugo himself are remarkably similar in all but the most arbitrary differences, and the same may be said, to a less extent, of the prose and the verse style of Goethe. But Shelley's prose and Shelley's verse (to confine myself to examples taken from the nineteenth century) are radically different in all points of their style and verbal power; and so are Coleridge's prose and Coleridge's verse. The same is eminently true of Shakespeare, and true to a very great extent of Milton. If it is less true of Dryden and of Pope (it is often true of Dryden to a great degree), that is exactly in virtue of the somewhat un-English influence which, though it benefited English prose not a little, worked upon both. In our own days prose style has become somewhat disarranged, but in the hands of those who have any pretence to style at all, its merits and its defects are in great part clearly traceable to a keeping apart on the one hand, to a confusion on the other, of the separate and distinct aims and methods of the prose-writer and the poet.

It should scarcely be necessary to say that no attempt is made in this essay to compile a manual of English prose writing, or to lay down didactically the principles

of the art. The most that can be done, or that is aimed at, is the discovery, by a running critical and historical commentary on the course of English prose generally, what have been the successive characteristics of its style, what the aims of its writers, and what the amounts of success that they have attained. There is nothing presumptuous in the attitude of the student, whatever there may be in the attitude of the teacher. In the year 1876, at the suggestion of Mr John Morley, I attempted in the *Fortnightly Review* a study of the chief characteristics of contemporary prose[1]. Since then I have reviewed many hundreds of new books, and have read again, or for the first time, many hundreds of old ones. I do not know that the two processes have altered my views much: they certainly have not lessened my estimate of the difficulty of writing good prose, or of the merit of good prose when written. During these years considerable attention has undoubtedly been given by English writers to style: I wish I could think that the result has been a distinct improvement in the quality of the product. If the present object were a study of contemporary prose, much would have to be said on the growth of what I may call the Aniline style and the style of Marivaudage, the first dealing in a gorgeous and glaring vocabulary, the second in unexpected turns and twists of thought or phrase, in long-winded description of incident, and in finical analysis of motive. Unexpectedness, indeed, seems to be the chief aim of the practitioners of both, and it lays them perhaps open to the damaging question of Mr Milestone in *Headlong Hall*. When we hear that a bar of music has "veracity," that there is a finely-executed "passage" in a marble chimney-piece, that some one is "part of the conscience of a nation," that

[1] See this essay, *supra*. The present one dates from 1885.

the "andante" of a sonnet is specially noteworthy, the quest after the unexpected has become sufficiently evident. But these things are not directly our subject, though we shall find other things remarkably like them in the history of the past. For there is nothing new in art except its beauties, and all the faults of French naturalism and English æstheticism were doubtless perfectly well known to critics and admired by the uncritical in the days of Hilpa and Shalum.

Although there are delightful writers in English prose before the reign of Elizabeth, it was not till that reign was some way advanced that a definite effort on the part of writers to make an English prose style can be perceived. This effort took for the most part one of two directions. The first was vernacular in the main, but very strongly tinged with a peculiar form of preciousness, the origin of which has been traced to various sources, but which appears clearly enough in the French *rhétoriqueurs* of the fifteenth century, whence it spread to Italy, Spain, and England. This style, in part almost vulgar, in part an *estilo culto* of the most quintessenced kind, was represented chiefly by Lyly. But it is in fact common to all the Elizabethan pamphleteers—Greene, Nash, Harvey, Dekker, Breton, and the rest. The vernacular in many of them descends even to vulgarity, and the cultivated in Lyly frequently ascends to the incomprehensible. Few things are more curious than this mixture of homespun and tinsel, of slang and learning, of street repartees and elaborate coterie preciousness. On the other hand, the more sober writers were not less classical than their forerunners, though in the endeavour to write something else than Latin sentences rendered into English, or English sentences that would translate with little alteration into Latin, they fell into new difficulties. In all the

Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline authors, there occur inelegancies and obscurities which may be traced directly to the attempt to imitate the forms of a language possessed of regular inflections and strict syntax in a language almost destitute of grammar. Especially fatal is the attempt to imitate the Latin relative and demonstrative pronouns, with their strict agreement of gender, number, and case, to render them in usage and meaning by the English words of all work *who*, *which*, *he*, *they*, and to copy the *oratio obliqua* in a tongue where the verbs for the most are indistinguishable whether used in *obliqua* or in *recta*. These attempts lie at the root of the faults which are found even in the succinct style of Hooker and Jonson, which turn almost to attractions in the quaint paragraph-heaps of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which mar many of the finest passages of Milton and Taylor, and which in Clarendon perhaps reach their climax. The abuse of conjunctions—which is also noticeable in most of the writers of this period, and which leads them, apparently out of mere wantonness, to prefer a single sentence jointed and rejointed, parenthesised and post-scripted, till it does the duty of a paragraph, to a succession of orderly sentences each containing the expression of a simple or moderately complex thought —is not chargeable quite so fairly on imitation of the classics. But it has something to do with this, or rather it has much to do with the absence of any model except the classics. Most of these writers had a great deal to say, and they were as much in want of models as of deterrent examples in regard to the manner of saying it. The feeling seems still to have prevailed that if a man aimed at literary elegance and precision he should write in Latin, that English might be a convenient vehicle of matter, but was scarcely susceptible of form,

that the audience was *ex hypothesi* incult, uncritical, exoteric, and neither required nor could understand refinements of phrase.

I have more than once seen this view of the matter treated with scorn or horror, or both, as if those who take it thought little of the beauty of seventeenth century prose before the Restoration. This treatment does not appear very intelligent. The business of the critic is to deal with and to explain the facts, and all the facts. It is the fact, no doubt, that detached phrases, sentences, even long passages of Milton, of Taylor, of Browne, equal if they do not excel in beauty anything that English prose has since produced. It is the fact that Clarendon is unmatched for moral portrait painting to this day; that phrase after phrase of Hobbes has the ring and the solidity and the sharp outline of a bronze coin; that Bacon is often as glorious without as within. But it is, at the same time, and not less often, the fact that Clarendon gets himself into involutions through which no breath will last, and which cannot be solved by any kind effort of repunctuation; that Milton's sentences, beginning magnificently, often end in mere tameness, sometimes in mere discord; that all the authors of the period abound in what look like wilful and gratuitous obscurities, cacophonies, breaches of sense and grammar and rhythm. To any one who considers the matter in any way critically, and not in the attitude of mind which shouts "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" by the space of as many hours as may be, it is perfectly evident that these great men, these great masters, were not thoroughly masters of their instrument; that their touch, for all its magic in its happier moments, was not certain; that they groped, and sometimes stumbled in their walk. When Browne begins the famous descant, "Now these dead bones";

when Hobbes gathers up human vice and labels it unconcernedly as "either an effect of power or a cause of pleasure"; when Milton pours forth any one of the scores of masterpieces to be found here and there in his prose work, let us hold our tongues and simply admire. But it is a merely irrational admiration which refuses to recognise that Browne's antithesis is occasionally an anti-climax and his turn of words occasionally puerile; that Milton's sentences constantly descend from the *mulier formosa* to the *piscis*; and that Hobbes, after the very phrase above quoted, spoils its effect as style by a clumsy repetition of nearly but not quite the same form of words, after a fashion which few writers possessing a tithe of Hobbes's genius would have imitated in the eighteenth century. It is still more irrational to deny that most of this great group of writers occasionally make what are neither more nor less than "faults of English," or grammatical blunders which actually vitiate their sense. Let us admire Alexander by all means, but let us not try to make out that Alexander's wry neck is worthy of an Apollo or an Antinous.

Among the chief reasons for this slowness on the part even of great writers in recognising the more obvious requirements of English prose style, not the least perhaps may be found in the fact that English writers had no opportunity of comparison in modern tongues. German literature was not, and Spanish and Italian, which had been cultivated in England with some zeal, were too alien from English in all linguistic points to be of much service. The Restoration introduced the study and comparison of a language which, though still alien from English, was far less removed from it than the other Romance tongues, and which had already gone through its own reforming process

with signal success. On the other hand, the period of original and copious thought ceased in England for a time, and men, having less to say, became more careful in saying it. The age of English prose which opens with Dryden and Tillotson (the former being really entitled to almost the sole credit of opening it, while Tillotson has enjoyed his reputation as a "stylist," and still more as an originator of style at a very easy rate) produced, with the exception of Swift and Dryden himself, no writer equal in genius to those of the age before it. But the talent of the writers that it did produce was infinitely better furnished with command of its weapons, and before the period had ceased English prose as an instrument may be said to have been perfected. Even in Dryden, though not very often, and in his followers Temple and Halifax occasionally, there appear examples of the old slovenlinesses; but in the writers of the Queen Anne school these entirely disappear. To the present day, though their vocabulary may have in places become slightly antiquated, and their phrase, especially in conversational passages, may include forms which have gone out of fashion, there is hardly anything in the structure of their clauses, their sentences, or their paragraphs, which is in any way obsolete.

The blemishes, indeed, which had to some extent disfigured earlier English prose, were merely of the kind that exists because no one has taken the trouble to clear it away. Given on the one side a certain conversational way of talking English, inaccurate or rather licentious as all conversational ways of speaking are, and on the other side a habit of writing exact and formal Latin, what had happened was what naturally would happen. Dryden, who during the whole of his life was a constant critical student of language and

style, may be said, if not to have accomplished the change single-handed, at any rate to have given examples of it at all its stages. He in criticism chiefly, Temple in miscellaneous essay writing, and Halifax in the political pamphlet, left very little to be done, and the Queen Anne men found their tools ready for them when they began to write. It is moreover very observable that this literary change, unlike many if not most other literary changes, had hardly anything that was pedantic about it. So far was it from endeavouring to classicise English style, that most of its alterations were distinctly directed towards freeing English from the too great admixture of Latin grammar and style. The vernacular influence, of which, almost in its purity, the early part of the period affords such an admirable example in Bunyan, while the later part offers one not much less admirable in Defoe, is scarcely less perceptible in all the three writers just mentioned, Dryden, Temple, and Halifax, and in their three great successors, Swift, Addison, and Steele. Addison classicises the most of the six, but Addison's style cannot be called exotic. The ordinary English of the streets and the houses helped these men to reform the long sentence, with its relatives and its conjunctions, clumsily borrowed from Latin, to reject inversions and involutions of phrase that had become bewildering in the absence of the clue of inflexional sounds, to avoid attempts at *oratio obliqua* for which the syntax of the language is ill-fitted, to be plain, straightforward, unadorned. It is true that in rejecting what they thought, in many instances rightly, to be barbarisms, they to a great extent lost the secret of a splendour which had been by no means exclusively or often barbaric. They were unrivalled in vigour, not easily to be beaten in sober grace, abundantly capable of wit: but as a rule

they lacked magnificence, and prose was with them emphatically a *sermo pedestris*. Except in survivors of the older school, it is difficult to find in post-Restoration prose an impassioned passage. When the men of the time wished to be impassioned they thought it proper to drop into poetry. South's satire on the "fringes of the North-star" and other Taylorisms expresses their attitude very happily. It is hardly an accident that Dryden's subjects, capable though the writer was of giving literary expression to every form of thought and feeling, never in prose lead him to the inditing of anything exalted; that Temple gives a half-sarcastic turn to the brief but exquisite passage on life which closes his essay on poetry; that Addison's renowned homilies on death and tombs and a future life have rather an unrivalled decency, a propriety that is quintessential, than solemnity in the higher sense of the term. The lack of ornament in the prose of this period is perhaps nowhere more clearly shown than in the style of Locke, which, though not often absolutely incorrect, is to me, I frankly own, a disgusting style, bald, dull, plebeian, giving indeed the author's meaning, but giving it ungraced with any due apparatus or ministry. The defects, however, were for the most part negative. The writers of this time, at least the greater of them, spoilt nothing that they touched, and for the most part omitted to touch subjects for which their style was not suited. The order, lucidity, and proportion of Dryden's criticism, the ease and well-bred loquacity of Temple and the essayists, the mild or rough polemic of Halifax and Bentley, the incomparable ironic handling of Swift, the narrative and pictorial faculty, so sober and yet so vivid, of Bunyan and Defoe, are never likely to be surpassed in English literature. The generation which equals the least of

them may be proud of its feat. This period, moreover, it must never be forgotten, was not merely a great period in itself as regarded production, but the schoolmaster of all periods to follow. It settled what the form, the technical form, of English prose was to be, and settled it once for all.

It is not usual to think or speak of the eighteenth century as reactionary, and yet, in regard to its prose style, it to some extent deserves this title. The peculiarities of this prose, the most famous names among whose practitioners are Johnson and Gibbon, exhibit a decided reaction against the plainness and vernacular energy which, as has been said, characterised writers from Dryden to Swift. Lord Chesterfield's well-known denunciation of proverbial phrases in speaking and writing, and the Latinisms of the extreme Johnsonian style, may seem to have but little to do with each other, but they express in different ways the revolt of the fine gentleman and the revolt of the scholar against the simplicity and homeliness of the style which had gone before. The men of 1660–1720 had not been afraid of Latinisms, but they had not sought them: the *ampullæ et sesquipedalia verba* of Johnson at his worst were by no means peculiar to himself, but may be found alike in the prose and the verse of writers over whom he exercised little or no influence. The altered style, however, in the hands of capable men became somewhat more suitable for the dignified branches of sustained prose-writing. We shall never have a greater historian in style as well as in matter than Gibbon; in style at least we have not beaten Hume, though there has been more than a century to do it in. Berkeley belongs mainly to the latest school of seventeenth century writers, to the Queen Anne men, but partly also to the eighteenth century proper; and he, again

with Hume as a second, is as unlikely to be surpassed in mastery of philosophical style as Gibbon and Hume are unlikely to be surpassed in the style of history. Nor were there wanting tendencies and influences which counteracted to a great extent the striving for elaboration and dignity. The chief of these was the growth of the novel. This is not only in itself a kind unfriendly to a pompous style, but happened to attract to its practice the great genius of Fielding, which was from nothing so averse as from everything that had the semblance or the reality of pretension, pedantry, or conceit. Among the noteworthy writers of the time, not a few stand apart from its general tendencies, and others exhibit only part of those tendencies. The homely and yet graceful narrative of the author of *Peter Wilkins* derives evidently from Defoe; the gossiping of the letters of Walpole, Gray, and others, is an attempt partly to imitate French models, partly to reproduce the actual talk of society; Sterne's deliberate eccentricity is an adaptation, as genius of course adapts, of Rabelais and Burton, while the curious and inimitable badness of the great Bishop Butler's form is evidently due, not like Locke's to carelessness and contempt of good literary manners, but to some strange idiosyncrasy of defect. On the whole, however, the century not merely added immortal examples to English prose, but contributed not a little to the further perfecting of the general instrument. A novelist like Fielding, a historian like Gibbon, a philosopher like Hume, an orator and publicist like Burke, could not write without adding to the capacities of prose in the hands of others as well as to its performances in their own. They gave a further extension to the system of modulating sentences and clauses with a definite regard to harmony. Although

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there may be too much monotony in his method, it seems unlikely that Gibbon will ever be surpassed in the art of arranging the rhythm of a sentence of not inconsiderable length without ever neglecting co-ordination, and at the same time, without ever committing the mistake of exchanging the rhythm proper to prose for the metre which is proper to poetry. Much the same may be said of Burke when he is at his best, while two earlier ornaments of the period, Bolingbroke and Conyers Middleton, though their prose is less rhythmical, are scarcely less remarkable for a deliberate and systematic arrangement of the sentence within itself and of the sentences in the paragraph. To enumerate separate particulars in which the eighteenth and late seventeenth centuries subjected English prose to laws would be appropriate rather to a manual of composition than to an essay like the present. For instance, such details as the reform of punctuation, and especially the more frequent use of the full stop, as the avoidance of the homœoteleuton, and if possible of the same word, unless used emphatically, in the same sentence, can be only very summarily referred to. But undoubtedly the matter of principal importance was the practice, which as a regular practice began with Dryden and was perfected in Gibbon, of balancing and proportioning the sentence. Of course there are numerous or innumerable examples of exquisitely proportioned sentences in Milton and his contemporaries, but that is not to the point. What is to the point is such a sentence as the following from the *Areopagitica*: "But if his rear and flanks be not impaled, if his back-door be not secured by the rigid licenser but that a bold book may now and then issue forth and give the assault to some of his old collections in their trenches, it will concern him then to keep

waking, to stand in watch, to set good guards and sentinels about his received opinions, to walk the round and counter-round with his fellow-inspectors, fearing lest any of his flock be seduced, *who then also would be better instructed, better exercised and disciplined.*" Here the sentence begins excellently, winds up the height to "trenches," and descends again in an orderly and regular fashion to "seduced." There in sense, in sound, by all the laws of verbal architecture, it should stop: but the author has an afterthought, and he tacks on the words italicised, thereby ruining the balance of his phrase, and adding an unnecessary and disturbing epexegesis to his thought. Had Milton lived a hundred years later he would no more have committed this merely careless and inerudite fault than Gibbon would.

Like all rules of general character, the balancing of the sentence has of course its difficulties and its dangers. Carried out on principles too uniform, or by means too obvious, it becomes monotonous and disgusting. It is a considerable encouragement to sonorous platitude, and (as satirists have sometimes amused themselves by showing) it can sometimes be used to disguise and carry off the simply unmeaning. When Mrs St Clair in *The Inheritance* uttered that famous sentence, "Happy the country whose nobles are thus gifted with the power of reflecting kindred excellence, and of perpetuating national virtue on the broad basis of private friendship," she owed everything to the fact that she was born after Dr Johnson. Very large numbers of public speakers in and out of pulpits were, during the time when prose rhythm by means of balance was enforced or expected, in a similar case of indebtedness. But the amount of foolish speech and writing in the world has not appreciably lessened since

every man became a law unto himself in the matter of composition. And for my part I own, though it may be immoral, that I prefer a platitude which seems as if it might have some meaning, and at any rate sounds well as sound, to a platitude which is nakedly and cacophonously platitudinous or senseless,—still more to one which bedizens itself with adjectives and crepitates, as Dr Johnson might have said, with attempts at epigram. The Latinising of the language was a greater evil by far, but one of no lasting continuance. No permanent harm came to English literature from Johnson's noted second thought about vitality and putrefaction, or from Armstrong's singular fancy (it is true this was in verse) for calling a cold bath a gelid cistern. The fashion rose, lived, died, as fashions do. But beauty looks only a little less beautiful in the ugliest fashion, and so the genius and talent of the eighteenth century showed themselves only to a little less advantage because of their predilection for an exotic vocabulary. No harm was done, but much good, to the theory and practice of verbal architecture, and if inferior material was sometimes used, Time has long since dealt with each builder's work in his usual just and equal fashion.

With the eighteenth century, speaking generally,—with Burke and Gibbon, speaking particularly,—what may be called the consciously or unconsciously formative period of English prose came to an end. In the hundred years that have since passed we have had not a few prose writers of great genius, many of extreme talent. But they have all either deliberately innovated upon, or obediently followed, or carefully neglected, the two great principles which were established between 1660 and 1760, the principle, that is to say, which limited the meaning of a sentence to a moderately

complex thought in point of matter, and that which admitted the necessity of balance and coherent structure in point of form. One attempt at the addition of a special kind of prose, an attempt frequently made but foredoomed to failure, I shall have to notice, but only one.

The great period of poetical production which began with the French Revolution and lasted till about 1830, saw also much prose of merit. Coleridge, Southey, Shelley, are eminent examples in both prose and verse, while Wordsworth, Byron, Moore, and others, come but little behind. Scott, the most voluminous of all except perhaps Southey in prose composition, occupies a rather peculiar position. The astonishing rapidity of his production, and his defective education (for good prose-writing is far more a matter of scholarship than good verse-writing), may have had a somewhat injurious influence on his style; but this style has on the whole been rated much too low, and at its best is admirable English. The splendour, however, of the poetical production of the later Georgian period in poetry no doubt eclipsed its production in prose, and as a general rule that prose was rather even and excellent in general characteristics than eminent or peculiar in special quality. The same good sense which banished the artificial vocabulary of poetry achieved the banishing of it from prose. But except that it is always a little less stiff, and sometimes a little more negligent, the best prose written by men of middle or advanced age when George the Third was dying does not differ very greatly from the best prose written by men of middle or advanced age when he came to the throne. The range of subjects, the tone of thought, might be altered, the style was very much the same; in fact, there can be very little doubt that while the

poets deliberately rebelled against their predecessors, the prose writers, who were often the same persons in another function, deliberately followed, if they did not exactly imitate them.

It was not until the end of this period of brilliant poetry that certain persons more or less deliberately set themselves to revolutionise English prose, as the poets for a full generation had been revolutionising English verse. I say more or less deliberately, for the revived fashion of "numerous" prose which one man of genius and one man of the greatest talent, Thomas de Quincey and John Wilson, proclaimed, which others seem to have adopted without much of set purpose, and which, owing especially to the great example of Mr Ruskin, has enlisted so large a following, was in its origin partial and casual. The introducers of this style have hardly had due honour or due dishonour, for what they have done is not small, whatever may be thought of its character. Indeed, at the present day, among a very large proportion of general readers, and among a certain number of critics, "style" appears to be understood in the sense of ornate and semi-metrical style. A work which is "not remarkable for style" is a work which does not pile on the adjectives, which abstains from rhythm so pronounced and regular that it ceases to be rhythm merely and becomes metre, which avoids rather than seeks the drawing of attention to originality of thought by singularity of expression, and which worships no gods but proportion, clearness, closeness of expression to idea, and (within the limits incident to prose) rhythmical arrangement. To confess the truth, the public has so little prose of this latter quality put before it, and is so much accustomed to find that every writer whose style is a little above the school exercise, and his thought a little above platitude,

aims at the distinction of prose-poet, that it has some excuse for its blunder. That it is a blunder I shall endeavour to show a little later. For the present, it is sufficient to indicate the period of George the Fourth's reign as the beginning of the flamboyant style in modern English prose. Besides the two persons just mentioned, whose writings were widely distributed in periodicals, three other great masters of prose, though not inclined to the same form of prose-poetry, did not a little to break down the tradition of English prose in which sobriety was the chief thing aimed at. These were Carlyle, with his Germanisms of phrase and his sacrifice (not at all German) of order to emphasis in arrangement; Macaulay, with his sententious clause and his endless fire of snapping antithesis; and lastly, with not much influence on the general reader, but with much on the special writer, Landor, who, together with much prose that is nearly perfect, gave the innovators the countenance of an occasional leaning to the florid, and of a neo-classicism which was sometimes un-English.

Side by side with these great innovators there were no doubt many and very excellent practitioners of the older and simpler style. Southey survived and Lockhart flourished as accomplished examples of it in one great literary organ; the influence of Jeffrey was exerted vigorously, if not always wisely, to maintain it in another. Generally speaking, it was not admitted before 1850 that the best models for a young man in prose could be any other than the chief ornaments of English literature from Swift and Addison to Gibbon and Burke. The examples of the great writers above mentioned, however, could not fail to have a gradual effect; and, as time passed, more and more books came to be written in which one of two things was evident.

The one was that the author had tried to write a prose-poem as far as style was concerned, the other that he was absolutely without principles of style. I can still find no better instance of this literary antinomianism than I found of old[1] in Grote's *History*, where there is simply no style at all. The chief political speeches and the most popular philosophical works of the day supply examples of this antinomian eminence in other departments. Take almost any chief speaker of either House and compare him with Burke or Canning or Lord Lyndhurst; take almost any living philosopher and compare him with Berkeley, with Hume, or even with Mill, and the difference is obvious at once. As history, as politics, as philosophy, the later examples may be excellent. But as literature they are not comparable with the earlier.

In the department of luxuriant ornament, the example of Mr Ruskin may be said to have rendered all other examples comparatively superfluous, though many of our later practitioners, as usual, scorn their model. From the date of the first appearance of *Modern Painters*, the prose-poetry style has more and more engrossed attention and imitation. It has eaten up history, permeated novel-writing, affected criticism so largely that those who resist it in that department are but a scattered remnant. It is unnecessary to quote instances, for the fact is very little likely to be gainsaid, and if it is gainsaid at all, will certainly not be gainsaid by any person who has frequent and copious examples of English style coming before him for criticism[2].

[1] See the essay before referred to.

[2] It should perhaps be added that in the seven years since the text was first written the popularity—in each case late, in each well deserved, but in each also too often a matter of mere fashion, as was the previous neglect of them—of Mr Browning in verse and of Mr Meredith in prose has set fresh models before those whose one idea is to escape, at any cost, the appearance of commonplace. [1892.]

At the same time the period of individualism has given rise, as a former period of something like individualism did in the seventeenth century, to some great and to many remarkable writers. Of these, so far as they have not been distinguished by an adherence to the ornate style, and so far as they have not, with the disciples of literary *incuria*, let style go to the winds altogether, Mr Carlyle was during all his later days the chief, and in not a few cases the model. But he had seconds in the work, in many of whom literary genius to a great extent supplied the want of academic correctness. Thackeray, with some remarkable slovenliness (he is probably the last writer of the first eminence of whom the enemy "and which" has made a conquest), elaborated, rather it would seem by practice and natural genius, than in the carrying out of any theory, a style which for the lighter purposes of literature has no rival in urbanity, flexibility, and width of range since Addison, and which has found the widest acceptance among men of letters. Dickens again, despite very great faults of bad taste and mannerism, did not lack the qualities of a great writer. He seldom had occasion for a sustained effort in prose writing, and the "tricks and manners" to which he was so unfortunately given lent themselves but too easily to imitation. Of the many writers of merit who stand beside and below these two space here forbids detailed mention. There are also many earlier authors who, either because they have been merely exceptional, or because they have been examples of tendencies which others have exhibited in a more characteristic manner, have not been noticed specially in the foregoing sketch. To take the eighteenth century only, Cobbett ranks with Bunyan and Defoe as the third of a trio of deliberately vernacular writers. The exquisite grace and charm of

Lamb, springing in part no doubt from an imitation of the "giant race before the flood," especially Fuller, Browne, and Burton, had yet in it so much of idiosyncrasy that it has never been and is never likely to be successfully imitated. Peacock, an accomplished scholar and a master of irony, has a peculiarity which is rather one of thought than of style, of view-point towards the world at large than of expression of the views taken. The late Lord Beaconsfield, unrivalled at epigram and detached phrase, very frequently wrote and sometimes spoke below himself, and in particular committed the fault of substituting for a kind of English Voltairian style, which no one could have brought to greater perfection if he had given his mind to it, corrupt followings of the sensibility and philosophism of Diderot and the mere grandiloquence of Buffon.

Thus then the course of English prose style presents, in little, the following picture. Beginning for the most part with translations from Latin or French, with prose versions of verse writings, and with theological treatises aiming more at edification, and at the edification of the vulgar, than at style, it was not till after the invention of printing that it attempted perfection of form. But in its early strivings it was much hindered, first by the persistent attempt to make an uninflected do the duty of an inflected language, and secondly, by the curious flood of conceits which accompanied, or helped, or were caused by the Spanish and Italian influences of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the latter period we find men of the greatest genius producing singularly uneven and blemished work, owing to the want of an accepted theory and practice of style; each man writing as seemed good in his own eyes, and selecting not merely his vocabulary (as to that a great freedom has always, and rightly,

prevailed in England), but his arrangement of clauses and sentences, and even to some extent his syntax. To this period of individualism an end was put by Dryden, whose example in codifying and reforming was followed for nearly a century. During this period the syntactical part of English grammar was settled very nearly as it has hitherto remained; the limitation of the sentence to a single moderately simple proposition, or at most to two or three propositions closely connected in thought, was effected; the arrangement of the single clause was prescribed as nearly as possible in the natural order of vocal speech, inversions being reserved as an exception and a licence for the production of some special effect; the use of the parenthesis was (perhaps unduly) discouraged; and a general principle was established that the cadence as well as the sense of a sentence should rise gradually toward the middle, should if necessary continue there on a level for a brief period, and should then descend in a gradation corresponding to its ascent. These principles were observed during the whole of the eighteenth century, and with little variation during the first quarter of the nineteenth, a certain range of liberty being given by the increasing subdivision of the subjects of literature, and especially by the growth of fiction and of periodical writing on more or less ephemeral matters. The continuance of this latter process, the increased study of foreign (especially German) literature, the disuse of Greek and Latin as the main instruments of education, and the example of eminent or popular writers, first in small and then in great numbers, have in the last two generations induced a return of individualism. This has in most cases taken the form either of a neglect of regular and orderly style altogether, or of the preference of a highly

ornamented diction, and a poetical rather than prosaic rhythm. The great mass of writers belong to the first division, the smaller number who take some pains about the ordering of their sentences almost entirely to the second. That this laboured and ornate manner will not last very long is highly probable, that it should last long would be out of keeping with experience. But it is not so certain that its disappearance will be followed by anything like a return to the simplicity of theory and practice in style which, while it left eighteenth century and late seventeenth century authors full room to display individual talents and peculiarities, still caused between them the same resemblance which exists in examples of an order of architecture or of a natural species.

So much has been said about the balancing of the sentence, and the rhythm appropriate to prose and distinct from metre, that the reader may fairly claim to be informed somewhat more minutely of the writer's views on the subject. They will have to be put to a certain extent scholastically, but the thing is really a scholastic question, and the impatience with "iambs and pentameters," which Mr Lowell (a spokesman far too good for such a breed) condescended to express a good many years ago on behalf of the vulgar, is in reality the secret of much of the degradation of recent prose. In dealing with this subject I shall have to affront an old prejudice which has apparently become young again—the prejudice which deems terms of quantity inapplicable to the English and other modern languages. The truth is, that the metrical symbols and system of scansion which the genius of the Greeks invented, are applicable to all European languages, though (and this is where the thoroughgoing defenders of accent against quantity make their blunder) the

quantity of particular syllables is much more variable. In other words, there are far more common syllables in English and other modern languages than in Latin, or even in the language of those

Quibus est nihil negatum
Et queis "ārĕs ărēs" licet sonare.

A Greek would have laughed heartily enough at the notion that the alternative quantity of *Ares* made it impossible to scan Homer regularly. And an Englishman may borrow the laugh: despite the large number of syllables (not by any means all) in his language which are capable of being made long or short according to the pleasure of the writer and the exigencies of the verse. All good English verse, from the rudest ballad of past centuries to the most elaborate harmonies of Mr Swinburne and Lord Tennyson, is capable of being exhibited in metrical form as strict in its final, if not in its initial laws, as that which governs the prosody of Horace or of Euripides. Most bad English verse is capable of having its badness shown by the application of the same tests. In using therefore longs and shorts, and the divisions of classical metre from Pyrrhic to dochmiac, in order to exhibit the characteristics of English prose rhythm and the differences which it exhibits from the metre which is verse rhythm, I am using disputed means deliberately and with the fullest intention and readiness to defend them if required[1].

I take it that the characteristic of metre—that is to say, poetic rhythm—is not only the recurrence of the same feet in the same line, but also the recurrence of corresponding and similar arrangements of feet in

[1] It has been pointed out to me, since the following remarks were written, that I might have sheltered myself under a right reverend precedent in the shape of some criticism of Hurd's on the rhythmical peculiarities of Addison. I do so now all the more willingly, that no one who compares the two passages will suspect me of merely following the bishop. (1892.)

different lines. The Greek chorus, and in a less degree the English pindaric, exhibit the first characteristic scantly, but they make up, in the first case by a rigid, and in the second by what ought to be a rigid, adherence to the second. In all other known forms of literary European verse—Greek, Latin, English, French, Italian, Spanish, German—both requirements are complied with in different measure or degree, from the cast-iron regularity of the Latin alcaic to the wide licence of a Greek comic senarius or an English anapæstic tetrameter. In blank verse or in couplets every verse is (certain equivalent values being once recognised) exactly equal to every other verse. In stanzas from the quatrain to the Spenserian the parallelism, if more intricate, is equally exact.

Now the requirement of a perfect prose rhythm is that, while it admits of indication by quantity-marks, and even by divisions into feet, the simplicity and equivalence of feet within the clause answering to the line are absent, and the exact correspondence of clause for clause, that is to say, of line for line, is absent also, and still more necessarily absent. Let us take an example. I know no more perfect example of English prose rhythm than the famous verses of the last chapter of the Canticles in the Authorised Version; I am not certain that I know any so perfect. Here they are, arranged for the purpose of exhibition in clause-lines, quantified and divided into feet.

Sĕt mĕ | ăs ă seāl | ŭpŏn thĭne heārt | ăs ă seāl | ŭpŏn thĭne ārm |
Fŏr lōve | ĭs strōng | ăs deāth | jeālŏusў | ĭs crūĕl | ăs thĕ grāve |
Thĕ coāls thĕreŏf | āre coāls | ŏf fīrĕ | whĭch hāth | ă mŏst vē- | hĕmĕnt flāme |
Mănў wătĕrs | cānnŏt quēnch lōve | neĭthĕr | căn thĕ floōds | drōwn ĭt |
Ĭf ă mān | woŭld gīve | ăll thĕ sūb- | stānce | ŏf hĭs hoūse | fŏr lōve | ĭt wŏuld ūt- | tĕrlў bĕ cŏntēmned. |[1]

[1] For some remarks on this scansion those who care to take the trouble may consult *English Prose Rhythm*, p. 21. (1923.)

I by no means give the quantification of this, or the distribution into lines and feet as final or impeccable, though I think it is, on the whole—as a good elocutionist would read the passage—accurate enough. But the disposition will, I think, be sufficient to convince any one who has an ear and a slight acquaintance with *res metrica*, that here is a system of rhythm irreducible to poetic form. The movement of the whole is perfectly harmonious, exquisitely modulated, finally complete. But it is the harmony of finely modulated speech, not of song; harmony, in short, but not melody, divisible into clauses, but not into bars or staves, having parts which continue each other, but do not correspond to each other. A similar example may be found in the almost equally beautiful Charity passage of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and if the reader likes to see how the sense of rhythm flourishes in these days, he may compare that with the version which has been substituted for it by the persons called Revisers. But let us take an example of different kind and of less elaborate but still beautiful form, the already cited close of Sir William Temple's *Essay on Poetry*:—

"When all is done, human life is at the greatest and the best but like a froward child, that must be played with and humoured a little to keep it quiet till it falls asleep, and then the care is over."

Here the division is that which has been noted as the usual one in eighteenth century prose, an arsis (to alter the use of the word a little) as far as "child," a level space of progress till "asleep," and then a thesis, here unusually brief, but quite sufficient for the purpose. But here also the movement is quite different from that of poetry. Part of the centre clause, "but like a froward child that must be played with," may indeed be twisted into something like a heroic, but

there is nothing corresponding to it earlier or later, and the twisting itself is violent and unnatural. For the clause or prose line does not begin at "but" and does not end at "with."

Here is yet another and longer passage, this time from Mr Ruskin, who, though he has by no means always observed the distinction we are discussing, and has taught many maladroit imitators to neglect it, is, when he is at his best, thoroughly sound. The sentence chosen shall be a long one, such as the writer loves:—

"He did not teach them how to build for glory and for beauty, He did not give them the fearless, faithful, inherited energies that worked on and down from death to death, generation after generation, that we might give the work of their poured-out spirit to the axe and to the hammer: He has not cloven the earth with rivers that their wild white waves might turn wheels and push paddles, nor turned it up under, as it were fire, that it might heat wells and cure diseases: He brings not up His quails by the east wind only to let them fall in flesh about the camp of men: He has not heaped the rocks of the mountain only for the quarry, nor clothed the grass of the field only for the oven."

At first sight it may seem as if this admirable passage (the brilliant effect of which is not in the least due to spilth of adjectives, or to selection of exotic words, or to eccentricity of word-order, for the vocabulary is very simple and plain, and the order is quite natural) incurs some of the blame due to the merely conglomerate sentence, in which the substitution of full stops for colons or commas is sufficient to break up the whole into independent wholes. But it does not, and it is saved from this condemnation not merely by the close connection of its matter, but by the arrangement of its form. The separate members have a

varying but compensating harmony, and the ascent and descent of the sentence never finally ends till the last word, which has been led up to by a most cunning and in no invidious sense prosaic concatenation of rhythm. Mr Ruskin, it is true, is not always impeccable. In a fine passage of *The Harbours of England* (too long for quotation, but which may be conveniently found at p. 378 of the *Selections* from his works) I find the following complete heroics imbedded in the prose:—

> "Hot in the morning sun, rusty and seamed."
> "The grass of spring, the soft white cloud of foam."
> "Fading or flying high into the breeze."
> "Brave lives dashed
> Away about the rattling beach like weeds."
> "Still at the helm of every lonely boat,
> Through starless night and hopeless dawn, His hand."

Now this is wrong, though of course it is impossible always to avoid a complete heroic cadence. So is it, also, with a very elaborate, and in its somewhat illegitimate way, very beautiful passage of Charles Kingsley—the dream of Amyas at the Devil's Limekiln, in *Westward Ho!* This sins not by conscious or unconscious insertions of blank verse, but by the too definitely regular and lyrical sweep of the rhythm in the words, "I saw the grand old galleon," etc. This is the great difficulty of very ornate prose, that it is constantly tending to overstep the line between the two rhythms. When this fault is avoided, and the prose abides strictly by its own laws, and draws its ornament, not from aniline dyes of vocabulary, but from harmony of arrangement, nothing can be more beautiful and more satisfactory. But in fact such prose does not differ at all in kind from satisfactory specimens of the simpler style, and it was De Quincey's great critical fault that he not only overlooked but denied this identity in his scornful criticisms of the style of

Swift and other severe writers. The same principles are applied with more or less elaboration as the case may be, the criterion of appropriateness in each case being the nature of the subject and the circumstances of the utterance.

It is because the rule of prose writing is in this way so entirely a μολύβδινος κανὼν, because between the limits of cacophony on the one hand and definitely metrical effect on the other, the practitioner must always choose and can never merely follow, that prose writing is so difficult, that the examples of great eminence in it are so rare, and that even these examples are for the most part so unequal. It is easy to produce long passages of English poetry which are absolutely flawless, which, each according to its own plan and requirements, could not be better. It is by no means easy to produce long passages of English prose, or of any prose, of which as much can be said. The artist lacks the help of obvious and striking error which he possesses in poetry. In poetry, as in the typewriter on which I write these words, a bell rings loudly to warn of certain simple dangers. The muse of prose is silent, however awkwardly her suitors make love to her. In the simpler style there is of course less danger of flaws—Swift is often quite impeccable—but as the style rises the danger increases. I do not think that even in Landor or in Mr Ruskin, the most accomplished, as the most opposed, English writers of the elaborate style during the century, it is possible to find an unbroken passage of very considerable length which is absolutely faultless.

This art of rhythmical arrangement, applicable in sentences so simple as that quoted from Temple, as much as in sentences so complex as that quoted from Mr Ruskin, applicable indeed in sentences much

simpler than the one and even more complicated than the other, is undoubtedly the principal thing in prose. Applied in its simplest forms, it is constantly missed by the vulgar, but is perhaps productive of not least pleasure to the critic. Of its subsidiary arts and arrangements of art, space would fail me to speak at length, but the two most important articles, so important, indeed, that with the architectural process they may be said to form the three great secrets of prose success, are simplicity of language, and directness of expression in the shorter clause and phrase. It is against these two that the pseudo-stylists of our day sin most constantly. A gaudy vocabulary is thought a mark of style: a non-natural, twisted, allusive phrase is thought a mark of it. Now no reasonable person, certainly no competent critic, will advocate a *grisâtre* style; all that such a critic will contend for is a remembrance of the rule of the Good Clerk,—

Red ink for ornament and black for use.

There are occasions for red ink in prose writing, no doubt; but they are not every man's occasions, nor are they, for the men whose occasions they are, on every day or on every subject. Not only the test passages taken above, but almost any well-selected Prose Anthology will show what extreme error, what bad art, what blind lack of observation, is implied in the peppering and salting of sentence after sentence with strange words or with familiar words used strangely. It is not wanted to produce the effect aimed at; it may safely be added that it produces the effect aimed at only in the case of persons who are not competent to judge whether the mark has been hit. Obscurity of phrase, on the other hand, is only a more venial crime than gaudiness of language because it takes a little more trouble on the part of the sinner.

It is at least as bad in itself. It may safely be laid down that in almost any case where the phrase is not comprehended as soon as read by a person of decent intelligence and education—in almost any case where, without quite exceptional need for emphasis or for attracting his attention, a non-natural, involved, laboured diction is used—in almost any case where, as Addison has it of Durfey, "words are brought together that, without his good offices, would never have been acquainted with one another, so long as it had been a tongue"—there is bad style. Exceptions there are, no doubt, as in the other case; the fault, as always, is in making the exception the rule.

To conclude, the remarks which have been made in this essay are no doubt in many cases disputable, probably in some cases mistaken. They are given not as *dogma*, but as *doxa*; not as laws to guide practitioners whose practice is very likely better than the lawgiver's, but as the result of a good many years' reading of the English literature of all ages with a constantly critical intent. And of that critical intent one thing can be said with confidence, that the presence and the observation of it, so far from injuring the delight of reading, add to that delight in an extraordinary degree. It infuses toleration in the study of the worst writers—for there is at any rate the result of a discovery or an illustration of some secret of badness; it heightens the pleasure in the perusal of the best by transforming a confused into a rational appreciation. I do not think that keeping an eye on style ever interfered with attention to matter in any competent writer; I am quite sure that it never interfered with that attention in any competent reader. Less obvious, more contestable in detail, far more difficult of continuous observance than the technical excellences of verse, the technical

excellences of prose demand, if a less rare, a not less alert and vigorous exercise of mental power to produce or to appreciate them. Nor will any time spent in acquiring pleasant and profitable learning be spent to much better advantage than the time necessary to master the principles and taste the expression of what has been called, by a master of both, "the *other* harmony of prose."[1]

[1] The remarks on prose rhythm in the latter part of this essay have been occasionally corrected, but for the most part only amplified and systematised in the *History* of the subject above referred to (1923).

IV

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL [1892]

In discussing the state of the English novel at a time which seems likely to be a rather exceptionally interesting one in the history of a great department of literature in England, it will probably be as well to make the treatment as little of a personal one as possible. Reviews of the *personnel* are in some cases allowable, and are at times not uninteresting: but they are rarely desirable, except when something like ignorance of it is presumable in the reader. When the survey is presented in a form which aims at a certain permanence they are better omitted, and so far as I have availed myself of anything formerly written on the present subject, or subjects akin to it, I have weeded out almost entirely anything like personal and individual reference. An exception or two to this may be found, but they shall be exceptions which certainly do not infringe the rule. In regard, I think, to most living practitioners of the craft, it will be more than possible—it will be a very great advantage—altogether to avoid either naming examples or expressing like and dislike for them.

[1][For the question happens not to be one of liking at all, still less one of ranking novelists, old and new, in order of merit. It is one of setting in order, as well as may be, the chief characteristics of the English novels of the day, and of indicating, with as little rashness as possible, which of them are on the mounting

[1] From this point to p. 128 the substance of this essay appeared, with some variation, in the *Fortnightly Review* for 1888.

hand and which are on the sinking. And for my part, and in the first place, I do not see any reason to think the reappearance of the romance of adventure at all likely to be a mere passing phenomenon. For the other kind has gone hopelessly sterile in all countries, and is very unlikely to be good for anything unless it is raised anew from seed, and allowed a pretty long course of time. In more than one sense its state was and is (for it still flourishes after a sort) less perilous with us than elsewhere. The habits and public opinion of the nation have kept us from that curious scholasticism of dull uncleanness on which too many French novelists spend their time. There is still too much healthy beefiness and beeriness (much of both as it has lost) in the English temperament to permit it to indulge in the sterile pessimism which seems to dominate Russian fiction. When we come to the comparison with America, we are getting on very delicate ground. Perhaps the best way of putting the difference is to recall a pleasant observation of Thackeray's, in his remarks on Maginn's *Maxims of O'Doherty*. O'Doherty laid it down (though for himself he thought it "nonsense") as a maxim of fashionable life, that you were to drink champagne after white cheeses, water after red; and Thackeray rejoined very truly that fashionable society did not trouble itself whether you did both, or neither, or either. Now America, a little young at "culture," is taking her literary etiquette books very seriously and trying to obey their minutest directions; while Englishmen, whose literary breeding is of an older stamp and tolerably well established, do not trouble themselves about it at all. For my part, I have said before that I think some of my friends are very hard on Mr Howells when he makes those comic little critical excursions of his, of which, my prayers having been heard, he has since

made a most valuable and instructive collection. Your virtuous beginner always plays the game with surpassing strictness, and is shocked at the lax conduct of oldsters.

In England we have escaped the worst of all these things even yet: though we have been drawing nearer and nearer to them. Half a score at least of writers possessing gifts which range from very considerable talent to decided genius, and perhaps not less than half a thousand possessing gifts ranging from very considerable talent to none at all, have elaborated, partly by their own efforts and partly by following the great models of the last generation, a kind of mixed mode of half-incident, half-character novel, which at its best is sometimes admirable, and at its average is often quite tolerable pastime. We are still curiously behindhand in the short story, the *nouvelle* properly so called, which is not a *märchen*, or a burlesque, or a tale of terror (these three we can sometimes do very well). If there is any falling off, the determined optimist may remember the mercies which tempered the domination of the Campaigner to poor Mr Binney. If we have cut off the cigars we have considerably improved the claret; or in other words, if we have lost some graces, some charms of the finest and rarest kind, we have greatly bettered the *average*—(I must be pardoned italics here)—the average structure and arrangement of the average novel. How weak a point this has always been with our great novelists, at any rate since the beginning of the century, everybody who has studied literary history knows. Scott never seems to have had the slightest idea of what was going to happen, or how it was going to happen, though as a matter of fact it generally did happen delightfully if irregularly enough. Dickens is supposed to have been very careful

about his schemes, though if any man can explain to me what the plot of *Little Dorrit* is; why Mr Tulkinghorn chose in that entirely irrational and unprofitable manner to persecute Lady Dedlock; why anything, no matter what, happens as it actually does happen in *Hard Times*; and what the sense or meaning of Estella's general conduct is in *Great Expectations*, he will do more than I have ever been able to do for myself, or than any one else has yet been able to do for me. Thackeray's sins (if in novel-writing it be not blasphemy to say that Thackeray sinned at all) are gross, palpable, and, for the matter of that, confessed by the sinner. In particular, if any one will try to arrange the chronology of the various Pendennis books, and if his hair does not turn white in the process, he may be guaranteed against any necessity for a peruke arising from similarly hopeless intellectual labour. Of course these things are usually very small faults. But they are faults, and I think that, on the whole, the tendency in average novel-writing during the last twenty years has been to correct them. Again, the average writing of the said novel is decidedly better, and, generally speaking, a distinct advance has been made in the minor details of craftsmanship. There are one or two popular writers, and many not yet popular, who still sin flagrantly in the old direction of taking fair pains over the first and the third volumes and flinging to the public the slovenliest botch of a second that it is likely to tolerate. But this want of literary conscience and literary self-respect is much rarer than it used to be, and appears to be regarded, by younger hands especially, with proper disgust.

Nevertheless I do not think, much as I respect many of its individual practitioners, that the English novel of the day in its average form is a work of art which

ranks very high. In the first place, though it has for many years almost wholly devoted itself to character, how many characters has it produced that will live, that will accompany in the memories of posterity the characters of the masters of the past? Very few, I think. We read its books often with pleasure, and sometimes with admiration, at the moment, but they add little to the abiding furniture of our minds and memories. And here let me guard against an objection which is obvious enough, that a man furnishes his mind pretty early, and by the time he comes to forty has no room left. I do not find it so. I have within the last few years, within the last few months, read books for the first time whose characters I am quite certain I shall not forget till I forget everything. Nor am I short of memory, for, as far as mere facts go, I could give plenty of details of many novels published in the last twenty years and more. But very few indeed of their characters and their incidents and stories have taken rank with Partridge at the theatre, with Habakkuk Mucklewrath's dying denunciation of Claverhouse, with Elizabeth Bennet's rejection of Darcy, with Esmond breaking his weapon before Beatrix's princely lover, with Lavengro teaching Armenian to Isopel Berners, with Amyas flinging his sword into the sea. I must confess also that I hold a creed which may seem to some people, perhaps to most, irrational and even childish. I do not think that there is exactly the same amount of genius and of talent always present on the earth, but I do think that in the blossoming times of the intellect the genius and the talent are pretty constant in their total amount. If you get the sum spread widely about you get the kind of work which is now abundant, and nowhere so abundant as in the novel. Of the immense numbers of novels which are

now written, a very large proportion cannot be called in any true sense bad, and of the still considerable number which are written by our best men there are few which may not be called in a very real sense good. The great models which they have before them, the large rewards of successful writing, and (for why should not a man magnify his own office?) the constant exposure and reprobation of the grosser faults of novel-writing on the part of critics[1], have brought about a much higher general level of excellence, a better turn-out of average work, than was ever known before. But, either from the very fact of this imitating and schoolmastering, or from sheer haste, or what not, we do not seem to get the very best things.

Undoubtedly, therefore, the return to the earliest form of writing, to the pure romance of adventure, is a very interesting thing indeed. We do not want here a detailed criticism of the books which have shown it. The point is, that in all the writers have deliberately reverted to the simpler instead of the more complicated kind of novel, trusting more to incident, less to the details of manners and character. I hold that they have done rightly and wisely. For the fictitious (as distinguished from the poetic) portraiture of manners and the fictitious dissection of character deal for the most part with minute and superficial points, and when those points have been attacked over and over again, or when the manners and characters of a time have become very much levelled and manner-

[1] At the same time I must admit that I could not undertake to teach the complete art of novel-writing in so many lessons. I was obliged once to confess as much, to a very amiable person who, in consequence of a critique of mine, sent me a cheque with an agreeable apology for its not being larger, and a request for more of that excellent advice. It was not possible to keep his cheque; but I have always thought that he must have been a very nice man. As a general rule authors do not send such documents to their critics; you may go a long way "without a cheque" on that road.

ised, an inevitable monotony and want of freshness in the treatment comes about. This seems to have been the case more or less in all European languages for a long time past. Except in the most insignificant details, manners have altered very little for the last half-century—a stability which has not been a little increased by the very popularity of novels themselves. A boy or girl now learns manners less from life than from books, and reproduces those manners in his or her own fresh generation. The novel has thus "bred in and in," until the inevitable result of feebleness of strain has been reached. But the incidents, and the broad and poetic features of character on which the romance relies, are not matters which change at all. They are always the same, with a sameness of nature, not of convention. The zest with which we read novels of character and manners is derived, at least in the main, from the unlikeness of the characters and manners depicted. The relish with which we read the great romances in prose, drama, and verse is derived from the likeness of the passions and actions, which are always at bottom the same. There is no danger of repetition here; on the contrary, the more faithful the repetition the surer the success, because the artist is only drawing deeper on a perennial source. In the other case he is working over and over again in shallow ground, which yields a thinner and weedier return at every cropping.

But it will be said, Are we to have nothing new? Are we simply to hunt old trails? Whereto I reply with a *distinguo*. A time may possibly come, may be near at hand, when some considerable change of political or social life may bring about so new a state of manners, and raise into prominence as an ordinary phase so different a side of human character, that the analytic

novelist may once more find ready to his hand new material. This in its turn will grow stale, just as the ordinary middle-class person, fairly educated and acquainted with the novelists from Scott downwards, is now getting stale in all European countries, even in those which, like Russia and America, seem as if they ought to have plenty of virgin soil to cultivate. And then that generation, whether it is the next or the next after, will have to return as we are doing to the romance for something fresh. For the romance is of its nature eternal and preliminary to the novel. The novel is of its nature transitory and is parasitic on the romance. If some of the examples of novels themselves partake of eternity, it is only because the practitioners have been cunning enough to borrow much from the romance. Miss Austen is the only English novelist I know who attains the first rank with something like a defiance of interest of story, and we shall see another Homer before we see another Jane. As for what we often hear about the novel of science, the novel of new forms of religion, the novel of altruism, and Heaven knows what else, it is all stark naught. The novel has nothing to do with any beliefs, with any convictions, with any thoughts in the strict sense, except as mere garnishings. Its substance must always be life not thought, conduct not belief, the passions not the intellect, manners and morals not creeds and theories. Its material, its bottom, must always be either the abiding qualities or the fleeting appearances of social existence, *quicquid agunt homines* not *quicquid cogitant.* In the first and most important division there has been no change within recorded history, and if esoteric Buddhism were to become the Church of England established by law, and a Great British Republic were to take the place of the monarchy, there

would be no change in these. There would probably be none if the whole human race were evicted from this earth and re-established in Mars. In the other class of materials there *is* a change, and the very fact of this change necessitates a certain intermission of dead seasons to let the new form germinate and ripen. There is perhaps no reason why a really great romance should not be written at any time. But it is almost impossible that a continuous supply of great character-novels or novels of manners should be kept up, and no one will deny that the novel of character and manners has been the favourite until quite recently. And so in a manner *consummatum est.* The average man and woman in England of the middle and late nineteenth century, has been drawn and quartered, analysed and "introspected," till there is nothing new to be done with him or her either as an *écorché*, or with the skin on, or with clothes on the skin. Merely as a man or woman, he or she can still be dealt with profitably, but then you have a romance and not a novel. Unfortunately, many of our best proved writers continue to write the novel and not the romance, or to treat the romance as if it were the novel. Thus we do not, and for this and the other reasons given and to be given, we cannot, get the best things.][1]

We get indeed many things that are good: good in ways which not so many years ago were unexpected if not undesired. The present year is the twentieth from that in which I first began to review novels, and during the earlier part of the intervening period it was possible, without being unduly given to pessimism, to take a very gloomy view of the future of English fiction, not merely on the considerations just advanced but for other reasons. The novelists of the elder generation

[1] Here ends the previously published part of this essay.

were dropping off one by one, and were not in their later years giving anything that could on just critical estimate rank with even their own best work. No actual "youngsters" of decided genius or even very remarkable talent had appeared in the early seventies. Between the old and the new there were practitioners of various, sometimes of great, ability, but hardly any who fulfilled the two conditions of absolutely great literature. The first of these is that something—phrase, personality, situation, what not—shall survive the reading of the book, the second that it shall be impossible to read it once only—that it shall of necessity and imperatively take its place on the shelves of that smaller library of predilection which the greater library even of the most limited book-collector contains. One exception there has been indeed to this throughout the whole period, and he to whom I refer remains an exception still. I remember when as a boy I read *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, thinking more or less dimly that here was a man from whom at any time an *Esmond* or an *Antiquary*, a *Manon Lescaut* (though I do not think I had read *Manon* then) or a *Trois Mousquetaires* might be expected. Thirty years later I read *One of Our Conquerors* with feelings almost exactly the same. I do not know whether Mr Meredith will write that book yet[1]. Defoe was on the eve of sixty when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, and Dryden was on the eve of seventy when he wrote the *Fables*.

During the last ten or fifteen years, but especially during the last five or ten, things have been different. There has been a great stir among the dry bones. Some new comers, of power which would have been remarkable at any time, have arisen: not a few oldsters have aroused themselves to take their craft very seriously,

[1] But he did not (1923).

and perhaps to magnify their office even a little overmuch: journeyings have been made by well-willing neophytes and others to the ends of the earth for models and motives: an immense enthusiasm has been shown for that one representative of the giant race before the flood who has just been referred to. There have been schools, methods, a propaganda, and indeed more than one—

> Principle! principle! principle! that's what I hears 'em say,

if the Laureate will pardon me. Our novelists have been, whether by self-examination or by stress of critics, convinced of sin in the matter of not taking enough trouble with the style of their books, with the plot, with the general stage management and stage carpentry. One has said to himself, "Go to, let us treat life with candour"; another, "Shall I live and die in respect of the young person?" a third, "Is there not something to be made of the undogmatically Christian romance?" a fourth, "Let us cease to be insular"; a fifth, "À bas l'incident!" a sixth (this is a rather favourite cry just now), "Let us raise language to a higher power and never say anything simply." Even that other symptom of the uprising of novelists against critics, and their demand that every newspaper shall give at least a column to the sober and serious laudation (for nothing else is to be thought of) of every serious work of fiction that issues from the press, is, though rather a grotesque, a cheering and healthy sign. The novelist, like the actor and the poet, is taking his *sacerdoce* sacerdotally, and is indignant at being treated lightly by the profane. This is, I say, a healthy sign: and should be reverently treated by those who have only too much difficulty in taking themselves or anything else with due seriousness.

But when we come to look a little narrowly into the

results of this activity it may be that they will not strike us as altogether in correspondence. I saw not long ago a half-shamefaced apology for the singular succession of roars which has of late years hailed the advent of divers new novelists and novels. This vociferation, it was urged, was at any rate better than a nasty cold system of ignoring or sneering at the lambs of the flock. I am not quite so sure of that. As a critic I begin to feel myself like Mr Browning's legate, and am constantly murmuring, "I have known *four*-and-twenty new stars in the firmament of the English novel." This state of things, looked at from a personal point of view, is no doubt pleasant—for the four-and-twentieth, and until the five-and-twentieth appears. But I doubt whether the three-and-twenty like it, and what is of much more importance, I doubt whether it is a good state of things either for the stars or the star-gazers, the latter especially. It must sometimes have seemed to cool-headed onlookers during the last few years that the British public, critics and all, had simply lost all faculty of distinguishing good from bad. Among the new reputations of the last decade we all know some cases not merely of undoubted and quite remarkable talent—of talent that must have made its way at any time, though it might have made it more healthily under a less forcing system—but of something that may be called genius by those who are least prodigal of the word. And we all—all of us who are in the least critical—know some cases either of utter worthlessness or of worth so excessively small that one wonders how on earth it has come to be recognised. This can hardly be a healthy state of things—states of "boom" seldom or never are signs of real health in the business in which they from time to time occur. Indeed, if nothing else were considered save the en-

couragement to over-production, the case would be perilous enough. It is sometimes the fashion to throw Scott in the face of those who demur to it, and who are very often admirers of Scott. But it seems to be forgotten that when Scott began novel-writing seriously he was a man far advanced in life, with an immense accumulated experience of reading, of society, of business, even of the practice of literature in other kinds. This is not usually the case with those new novelists of whom we have recently had about one a year, and of whom we may, it seems, shortly expect one a month. Once more let it be said that some at least of these new novelists would have made their way at any time and against any odds. But the others —would not.

However, let us count the positive gains of this recent bustle. These are at least three—variety of method and subject, increased carefulness of treatment, and increased carefulness of style. Perhaps all three are chequered advantages, but they are advantages. Some fifteen years ago the novel, the unconquerable unconventionality of Mr Meredith once more excepted, had certainly got rather into a rut. The difference between George Eliot and Miss Yonge, between Mr Trollope and Mr Black—to take examples as widely different in appearance as possible, but all of the upper class of novelists—might at first seem huge, but when it was subjected to true critical analysis it became very much smaller. Hardly anything—I do not say nothing—was cultivated but the novel as opposed to the romance; and the novel was for the most part further narrowed to ordinary upper middle-class English life. Now we have at least altered all that. The differences may still be a little more apparent than real, but the reality has advanced in proportion far

more than the appearance. We have revived the romance, if not on the greatest scale, on a scale which, with almost the solitary exceptions in the first class of *Lorna Doone* and *Westward Ho!* a whole generation had not seen. We have wound ourselves up to something like the pitch of the Romantics of sixty or seventy years ago in our demand for local colour, and that not merely external, as theirs too often was, but the local colour which derives from local peculiarities of thought and feeling, of manners and life. We have to a great extent shaken off the "diffusion-of-knowledge" Philistinism and the "sword-and-pen" cant of the middle of the century. If we are not more gay in one sense (for 'tis a generation which jocks wi' extreme deeficulty), we are much more what I believe the very newest school of critics calls *bunt*. In short, we are "boxing it about" merrily, with the old Jacobite confidence that "it will come to our father." Let us hope it will.

At the same time there is no doubt that the English novelist of the present day, incited partly by his study of foreign models and partly by the exhortations of the wicked critics, whose crimes he is never tired of denouncing (especially when, as frequently happens, he is holding the pen of the critic himself), has bestirred himself mightily in the matter of construction. Something has been said already on this point, and there is no doubt that, from having been the most scholarly of all novelists in the last century, Englishmen had become the most haphazard and lawless in this. We have altered that too to some extent—nay, to a great one. From the teller of short tales who bestirs himself to take away the well-known reproach from England, to the constructor of three-deckers who labours to avoid the razeeing of that time-honoured form, by constructing it more conscientiously and scientifically,

all our "fictionists" (as, I regret to observe, they allow some of their admirers to call them without instantly taking the offenders' lives) are as busy as bees. And they are as busy once more in the direction of style, where also their predecessors, good easy men, used to be a little, nay, more than a little, remiss. Here Mr Meredith's epigrams and his quaint remotely worded pictures in phrase are religiously copied as far as the copier can. There the dissection and mounting on microscopic slides of action and thought which have become fashionable in America occupy the reformers. A third set shall be found vying with one another in the endeavour to select and stick together the most gorgeous adjectives, to use words in the most unfamiliar, not to say impossible senses. In short, there is, as Mr Carlyle observed in one of the best because one of the quietest of his sardonic passages, a cheerful appearance of work going forward. And to do the workers justice, their intention is not, as in that case, destruction at all, but on the contrary construction.

How far has that intention been attained, and what are the drawbacks attending these efforts? This is the less cheerful, but perhaps also the more important, side of the subject. It would be uncritical to attack it by asking whether any, and if so what, remarkable books have been produced. Remarkable books may be and are produced at any time when there happen to be remarkable book-producers. The last decade in England has seen at least three, perhaps more, new writers of fiction who would have been remarkable at any time. But the things to put the finger on if possible are not these prize specimens, but the general results of the efforts just described. And perhaps here we shall have occasion to remember once more that exceedingly uncomfortable proverb "Seldom comes a better."

For the advantages above chronicled, with, I trust, impartiality and the absence of prejudice, have brought divers disadvantages in their train. To begin with, there is that extraordinary oppression which weighs upon so many of our novelists in regard to what is called the Young Person. For some time past divers of our most eminent hands have been lifting themselves up against the Young Person, deploring the terrible restraints that she imposes on their growing reputation, occasionally even emancipating themselves from her in a timid British way, and committing excesses in another variety of that shivering consciousness of sin which made Leigh Hunt, when he was a little boy of seven, and had said a naughty word, for a long time afterwards, when anybody took kind notice of him, say to himself, "Ah, they little think I'm the boy who said d—n!" Ambition to be the boy who says d—n causes these fiery souls to languish. But why do they not say d—n, and have done with it? The creeping and gingerly approaches to continental licences of speech and subject which we have seen lately seem to me, I confess, inexpressibly puerile.

Nor can I doubt that on the whole the general convention of English novelists during this century has been a sound one. There is, so far as I know, only one instance—Scott's alteration of the plot of *St Ronan's Well*—where it did distinct, unremedied, irremediable harm. I very much doubt whether *Pendennis* would have been improved by the different cast of one of its episodes which some of my friends desiderate, and I am sure *Vanity Fair* positively gains by the ambiguity in which Becky's technical "guilt" is left. The fact is that the spring of what is very liberally called passion is one which, in appearance facile and powerful, is really a very difficult one to bring into play, and is

lamentably monotonous and ineffective when abused, as it is apt to be. For my part, I would excuse either novelist or poet for violating any convention of the kind, but only on the admirable old condition that he comes in with a rope about his neck and is strung up ruthlessly if he fails to produce a masterpiece.

This, however, is of course only part of the great Realist mistake, and that has been spoken of already, and elsewhere. The rules as I take it, if rules can be spoken of in such a matter, are two only. The first is, "Disrealise everything, and never forget that whatever art is, it is not nature." The second is the same as that just given, "Try all things if you like: but if you try the exceptional, the abnormal, the unconventional, remember that you try it at your own peril, and that you must either make a great success or an intolerable and inexcusable failure."

So far, however, we are concerned simply with the subject; and as a rule very little depends in any art on the subject. The most that the subject can do is to give the measure of the artist in point of strength. If he is a good artist it does not matter how bad the subject is: if he is a bad artist it does not matter how good the subject is. All really depends on the treatment; and here we get into quite a different region—a region, however, which happens to be that which chiefly invites our attention. The two chief innovations in treatment which have been seen in the period under discussion, and the signs of which are most particularly evident at the present moment, are innovations, the one in handling incident, situation, motive, and so forth, the other in style.

The first may be said to consist in a great extension, as compared with the practice ever since the revival of the novel some eighty years ago, of the representa-

tion of the component parts, the intermediate processes, of thought and action. This is not in itself new: nothing is. Another form was, or, rather, other forms of this extension were conspicuous in the novel of Richardson in England and Marivaux in France. The last great practitioner of it was Miss Austen, who indeed raised it to something like absolute perfection; but it died with her among ourselves, at the same time, within a few years, as that at which Benjamin Constant in *Adolphe* was producing the last masterpiece of its older manner in France. With us it had no immediate resurrection: it was hardly dead in France before it was revived with a considerable difference by Beyle and Balzac on the other side of the Channel: and this later form, with many alterations and variants, is that which has survived in other countries to this day, is more popular in some of them than ever, and has from their practice been regrafted upon the English novel. The completest exaggerations of it are to be found in America and Russia. Now of this kind of novel (to use the singular for convenience sake) it is sometimes said that "the story is abolished," that "nothing happens," and so forth. This is, of course, not strictly true. A good deal often happens in Russian novels, and I have read American stories of the straitest sect in which incident was not entirely tabooed. But in both the poor creature is taught to know its place. The story, even if there is one, is of the last importance: the solemn and painstaking indication, as was said of Marivaux, of "everything you have said, and everything you have thought, and everything you would have liked to think but did not," is of the first. Instead of the presentation of the result you have an endless description of the process; instead of a succinctly presented quotient, an endless array of dividends and

divisors. To say that this is never satisfactory would be too much: I know at least one instance, Count Tolstoi's *Ivan Ilyitch*, which may defy criticism. But this very instance shows that the success is a *tour de force*, and it has never, that I know of, been reached in a long story by any one. As a contrast to the average Russian and American novel, take that admirable masterpiece *Pepita Jimenez*. Señor Valera is, I believe, sometimes pointed at for theirs by the ghostly Banquos of the analytic school. O creatures as unfortunate as doleful! It would be impossible to find a more complete or convincing *instantia contradictoria* of their principles. The only weak points in the book are those which draw to their side. Its interest depends on the manners-painting, the characters, and the story, the three things that they never reach, or reach in spite of their tendency to potter and trifle. Fortunately it cannot be said that this particular form has laid much hold on us, but it has laid some, and I expect it to lay more. For it is naturally attractive to the half-educated: and half-education is advancing with us by leaps and bounds.

It is also to this kind of imperfect culture that the other innovation of treatment, which has been widely described as one of style, appeals. This is more rampant with us, but it has also a more plausible pretext for ramping, for it has excuses of precedent contrast, and excuses of precedent pattern. Scott was notoriously and confessedly a rather careless writer, and the fashion of writing, either in parts separately published or in chapters of magazines, which set in after his death was the very likeliest fashion in the world to encourage careless writing. On the other hand, some of the most popular, and some of the greatest novelists of the second and third quarters of the century—Dickens, George Eliot, Mr Meredith—wide apart as they were in other

ways, agreed in having styles the reverse of careless, styles mannered and mannerised to the very *n*-th. We know from their own descriptions how some much younger writers of fiction have set themselves to acquire manners of their own: we know from their books how they and others have succeeded.

It would be superfluous to repeat here the various remarks bearing on the exact amount and character of that success which will be found in certain earlier essays of this volume. But, as I was writing this paper, a passage remarkable to the point came before me in the latest published volume of the *Journal des Goncourt*, the last, as M. Edmond de Goncourt assures us, that we shall have in his lifetime. He was a little annoyed, it seems, at finding that his old friend Flaubert had, in his correspondence with George Sand, spoken disrespectfully of the Goncourtian epithet. "No, my dear Flaubert," retorts M. de Goncourt, "*you* had not the epithets *osées*, *téméraires et personnelles* which authors who shall be nameless have. You had only *les épithètes*, *excellemment bonnes*, *de tout le monde*." Now there is no doubt that "les deux Goncourt," whatever may be thought of the positive value of their work, did anticipate, and have for many years (less excellently, perhaps, since the death of M. Jules, but that is neither here nor there) exhibited the tendencies and preoccupations as to style which have prevailed among the more careful men of letters in all European countries during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, it seems to me that the distinction which M. de Goncourt here puts sharply and well tells in a direction exactly opposite to that in which he intended it to tell. The epithets of genius are exactly the epithets *de tout le monde*, but "good to an excellent degree." These are the epithets of Shakespeare, of Dante, of

Homer, of all who have the Shakespearian, the Homeric, the Dantesque qualities. It is the attainment of this "excellent" degree that is the test-rub of genius. Whereas the "daring," the "rash," the "personal" epithet, which is the special game and object of talent, and especially of the talent of our day, stands in an entirely different category. When the talent is great the epithet is sometimes very happy, and you give it a hearty hand of approbation, as to the successful trick of a master in conjuring. It is sometimes anything but happy, and if you are well-bred you do not hiss it, but let it pass with as much indulgence as may be, like the *couac* of a generally well-graced singer. In the lower order of attempts, it is at its best a little fatiguing, at its worst utterly unendurable. Never does it excite the immediate assent, the almost silent rapture, the intense unceasing ever-novel admiration which are aroused by the great efforts of genius in making the common as though it were not common, in sublimating the ordinary language terrestrial to the seventh heaven.

Now it stands, I think, to reason that the deliberate seeker after style will too often stray in the direction of the *osé*, the *téméraire*, the *personnel*, not merely in epithets but in other things. Whether it stands to reason or not he certainly does it; and though there may not be many at the moment who perceive his error, the meet consequences of that error never have failed, and are never likely to fail. They are also, as it happens, illustrated unusually well in the history of novels. I have myself gone about for many years—a very different and inferior La Fontaine—asking, "Avez-vous lu?" *Hysminias and Hysmine*, which the books of reference sometimes call *Ismenias and Ismene*. There must be people who have read it, though I never

personally met one. Here, in a very wonderful kind of Greek (it is perfectly useless to attempt to read the book in a translation, for all its charms are necessarily lost), did a certain person of the twelfth century, by genius of anticipation or following of originals mostly lost to us, concentrate in one book Euphuism, Marivaudage, æstheticism, divers isms of the present day—which I could only indicate by taking divers respected proper names in vain—even Naturalism in a way, except that the author was a gentleman after his Lower Empire fashion. If the task of reading him is too great—and I must own that his lingo is extraordinary and his matter of a marvellous tediousness—there is Lyly, there is Madeleine de Scudéry, there is Marivaux, there is the Mr Cumberland whom gods call Sir Fretful, there are the followers of Mrs Radcliffe, there are many others, great and small, persons of genius, persons of talent, and persons equally destitute of either. They do not always aim specially or principally at style, but they often do so, and they always expend an immense determination, an almost piteous endeavour, on the attempt to do something great by taking thought, by exaggerating popular fashions, by running directly counter to them, by being eccentric, by being scrupulously correct, by anything, in short, but waiting for the shepherd's hour and profiting thereby in the best and most straightforward way they can.

The point to which we are coming will no doubt have been foreseen for a long time. It is that in this busy, this conscientious, this serious period of novel-writing, our novelists are, as a rule, far too much of Marthas and far too little of Maries. They cumber themselves tremendously about the fashion of serving us, and it seems horribly ungracious to criticise the viands served; yet it may be permissible to suggest that they are in

the wrong way. They seem to be beguiled by the dictum—true and important enough in itself—that novel-writing is an art. It is—and a fine art. No doubt also all art has its responsibilities. But the responsibilities of different arts are different, and the methods of discharging them are different too. What makes the art of literature in general the most difficult of all is the fact that nowhere is it more necessary to take pains, and yet that nowhere is mere painstaking not merely so insufficient but so likely to lead the artist wrong. And in this particular division of the literary art there is the still further difficulty that it is easiest, most obvious, and in the special circumstances of recent English literature apparently most praiseworthy, to take pains about those things which are not the root of the matter. In poetry the so-called "formal" part is of the essence. A halting verse, a cacophonous rhyme, a lack of musical accompaniment and atmosphere, will render unpoetical the very finest, and in happier circumstances the most really poetical, thoughts. Yet even in poetry attention to these formal matters will but rarely—it will sometimes when it is extraordinary—do of itself. In prose fiction, the nearest to poetry of the kinds of literature when it is at its best, the case is quite different. It is a pity that a novel should not be well written: yet some of the greatest novels of the world are, as no one of the greatest poems of the world is, or could possibly be, written anything but well. It is, at any rate, rather annoying that the plot of a novel should hang loosely together, that the chronology should be obviously impossible, that the author should forget on page 200 what page 100 has told his readers, that there should be little beginning, less middle, and no end. Yet some of the great, some of the greatest novels of the world, are open to objec-

tions of this kind. The truth is, that the novel is, while the poem is not, mainly and firstly a criticism of life. Great truths always lurk in great errors, and Naturalism, with its kindred faults, reveals this truth at once. The life may be life as it is, and we have the novel proper —life as we would have it to be, and we have the romance; but one or the other, not photographed, not grovellingly dissected, but rendered in the mediums and by the methods proper to art, it must be. All the requirements of the novelist are subsidiary and secondary to this, that he shall in his pages show us the result of the workings of the heart and brain, of the body, soul, and spirit of actual or possible human beings. Poetry is not so limited—novel-writing is.

Now the mistake of many of our careful and clever ones at the present day seems to me sometimes that, forgetting this chief and principal thing, they concentrate themselves on the secondary and subsidiary matters; sometimes that, accepting the requirement of rendering life, they prove unequal to it. I have already said that I would not have any subject ruled out as such. Remembering what a certain dramatist did with a certain Bellafront centuries ago, I should not be disposed to refuse permission to a certain novelist to experiment with a certain Tess, though I greatly prefer the straightforwardness of the earlier artist's title. I think that many attempts, and an exactly equal number of failures, have shown the impossibility of making a great historical character of whom much is directly known the central and ostensible hero or heroine of a novel: but if any will try it, he or she may try it at their own peril, and I will applaud if they succeed. I can even conceive (though I have never read one) a novel in which undogmatic Christianity might play a considerable part, and which yet might

be readable, and a novel. We have not, as it seems to me, a right to complain of any experiments: we have only a right to complain when experiments are made in the teeth of the teaching of experience, and do not succeed. Paradox, crotchet, new moralities, new theories of religion—all may be susceptible of being made into novels that ought to live and will live. It only seems to me that at the present day our clever novelists are a great deal too fond of deliberately selecting the most unsuitable materials and then endeavouring to varnish over the rickety construction with fine writing, with fashionable tricks of expression or treatment, with epithets *osées*, *téméraires et personnelles*, with doses of popular talk.

One special difficulty which besets the novelist, and of which he not infrequently complains when he aims at excellence, remains to be noticed. He is at the present moment, perhaps, the only artist whose art is liable to be confounded with the simple business of the ordinary tradesman. There is, and has been for at least two generations—perhaps indeed for three or four—a certain steady and increasing demand for "something to read" in the way of fiction. There are no parallels, so far as I know, to his difficulty in this respect. The only persons who stand in the same position are the purveyor of sermons and the purveyor of newspaper articles. But neither of these is expected, and it is entirely at his own risk if either undertakes, to present himself as a maker of books, that is to say, as a producer of something which is intended to last. The novel-producer, as distinguished from the novelist, is in really evil case in this matter: and the novelist, as distinguished from the novel-producer, is perhaps in worse. Nobody insists (thank Heaven!) that the usual journalist shall produce all his articles, or the usual

preacher all his sermons, for the year in book form:—I can answer for one class that some representatives of it, at any rate, though they may try to do their work as well as possible, would be horrified at the idea. The requirements of the circulating library insist upon the novel-producer doing this very thing: and as we know, the novelist, or he who hopes that he is a novelist, is very angry at the confusion which thus arises from their both addressing the same lady. It is natural, it is inevitable, that the results of this confusion should be almost always bad. When a man, as has just been said, caters for the general in sermon or article or platform speech, it is perfectly understood that he does not, except as a secondary thing and at his own peril and distinct volition, enter for any other stakes or seek to gain the Land of Matters Unforgot. When a man writes verse and publishes it, he does in form enter for the stakes, but the race is not run in public. The minor bard competes, except in the rarest instances, for his own pleasure before an extremely select audience composed of a few critics and a number, which it rests with him to limit in one direction and with themselves to limit in another, of holders of presentation copies. For myself I own that I am rather fond of reading minor poetry—much fonder of it than of reading minor novels. But that is a purely personal detail. It is an understood thing that the minor poet is not—I do not say that he does not wish to be—read. He publishes either because he cannot help it or because he likes it. The ambition of the curate, of the leader-writer, of the platform speaker, is sufficed by the day or the day after. But the unhappy novelist is obliged by the state of the demand to divulge himself widely, and put himself on more or less perpetual record. There are those of his kind who are very angry with the

managers of literary newspapers for taking account of this fact. They would have literary notice restricted to novels which aim at something higher than the circulating library demand. I have never indeed, being a person with some experience of newspapers, understood quite how their demand is to be complied with. Is the editor to read every novel and decide whether it is novel-journalism or novel-literature? I think this is barely feasible, for even an editor's day has but twenty-four hours, and even an editor's brain requires occasional rest and refreshment. Is he to have a special novel-referee, one, in fact, to whom all novels are to be handed over, and according to whose dictum they are to be reviewed or not? The selection of such referees would be difficult, and would, to take an abominably prosaic view, cost the proprietors of newspapers a vast sum of money, for which, except in prayers and curses, they would certainly not receive any appreciable return. Or are the deciding persons to be guided by name, vogue, previous work? In this I am bound again, from no small experience, to express my fear that a great deal of injustice would be done by inclusion in the selected circle, and a little (but the most serious in the long-run) by exclusion from it.

This may seem something of a digression: but it has a real connection with our subject. It is easily conceivable that when journalism and literature are in this way inextricably mixed and blended, almost any means will seem justifiable, nay, praiseworthy, to the aspirant to literature who wishes to declare himself, at once and unmistakably, to be other than those who are content with journalism. And this being so, we can hardly wonder at that strain and stress which I have noticed as marking our present more ambitious novels, without on the whole any corresponding ex-

cellence of result. Except at very rare intervals, it is acknowledged that a nation is a lucky nation if it possesses half a dozen persons who really deserve the name of poet: and if the poets in the course of an ordinary human life fill half a dozen volumes of the ordinary content of the volume of a circulating library novel, it is acknowledged that they have done very handsomely. We expect to have our novelists by dozens, by scores, by hundreds, and we expect them to produce their volumes, if not by hundreds, yet almost by scores, and certainly by dozens. Is this reasonable? Is this treating the artist as he deserves to be treated?[1] I do not take the other side and say, Is the acceptance of such an expectation and the attempt to fulfil it worthy of the novelist? For then we get into that hopeless and endless question of what Mr Anthony Trollope used delicately to call "details"—meaning thereby pounds, shillings, and pence—of the arguing of which there is no end, and which, after all, does not concern novel-writing more than any other kind of literature except in one point which is a little important. It *is* much more difficult for the novelist pure and simple to write, as it has been phrased, "articles for money and books for love," than for almost any other variety of man of letters. His novel-journalism without his name would be a drug: and with his name it at once enters into competition with his novel-literature.

It may seem as if I were shaping a course towards the somewhat paradoxical proposition that it will never be merry with novelists till the public gives over

[1] Since this was written I have found a counterpart of this argument in M. Ferdinand Brunetière's just published *Essais sur la Littérature Contemporaine*, art. "Critique et Roman," an excellent example of the author's robust polemic, which, however, takes more of a side than I think it necessary to take in a quarrel which would be much better unfought.

reading novels. And indeed there might be something to be said for this, for as long as the public insists on novels by the hundred and five hundred every year to read, certain things will follow. There will be a vast amount of unworthy stuff produced: there will be now and then for popular (not necessarily or probably for good) novels those huge prizes which entice more and more competitors into the race. There will be more and more the inducement, subtly extending, at once for the tradesman who aspires to be popular and for the artist who aspires to be good, to strive for distinction of whatever kind by illegitimate or scarcely legitimate means—by oddity, by licence, by quaintness, by strangeness, by spreading the sail, no matter at what angle, to the *popularis aura*. Demand no doubt creates supply, and supply stimulates demand: but what sort of each does the reflex action produce? I fear that churlish thing, the study of history, would reply, A supply that is by turns cheap and nasty, or distinguished from the cheap and nasty by fantastic preciousness; a demand that is by turns coarse and uncritical or squeamish and morbid.

And all this while there may be some who remember that the novel has never yet shown itself an enduring form in literature; that it rose very late, and so may be expected not to die—nothing dies—but to dwindle or change very early; that it has already had an almost unexampled flourishing time in slightly different varieties of one particular form; and that as for many centuries of ascertained progress, or rather continuance, in literature the unchanging human mind was content with brief and occasional indulgences in it, it is by no means impossible that the period of this particular indulgence is drawing to a close. To such reminders I neither assent wholly nor do I wholly rule them out.

The printing-press and the common half-educated reader must be taken into consideration. No former age possessed this combination of means to produce supply and circumstances to create demand. The newspaper and the novel, though each has produced in its time literature of the highest value, are both in themselves rather low forms of literature, and it is, I believe, an axiom of physical science, which has given itself to observing such things, that the low form is the most tenacious of life. As long as the Board School lasts, the ordinary manufacture of newspapers and novels must go on—a reflection which may have its consolations to those who are obliged to get their living by working at either mill. But whether either art or craft is likely to develop improvements such as will render it more prolific of real literature, that is one of the too numerous things which are "obscure to all except to God." The novel has at least produced some of nearly the greatest things in literature; this is its great, its exceeding great merit. That it has produced vast volumes of things that to-day are and to-morrow are cast into the oven, is not perhaps, rightly considered, a fact for regret.

And so we end with *Quién sabe?* Enormous fatalism, I take it, impresses itself on careful students of the history of literature—so obstinate is the wind in blowing where it listeth without the slightest reference either to the literary clerk of the weather, or to ingenious and diligent persons who, like our young officers in Burmah, get up on high places and explode large quantities of blasting powder in the hope of coaxing or forcing the wind and the rain with it. All things are possible in a time when a novelist of real talent like M. Zola dismisses Sir Walter Scott as a "boarding-school novelist," and when a critic of real intelligence

like my friend Mr Brander Matthews takes Mr Howells for an excellent critic. The safer plan is to stand still and see the wondrous works of the Lord. After all, the critic and the prophet are two extremely different persons: and criticism has not been usually most happy when it meddled with prophecy.

V

SHAKESPEARE AND THE GRAND STYLE[1]

The adventure of this paper may appear extravagant, but it has seemed to me perhaps not unfitting, if not for myself, yet for the person whom the English Association has thought fit to choose for its president in the third centenary year of the publication of the *Sonnets*. Nor is the adventurer, however moderate his prowess, quite untried in the kind, at any rate, of the quest. Some years ago, at the request of the Dante Society, I wrote and read a paper, till now unpublished, on the relation of that great poet to the mysterious entity called the Grand Style; and last year I ventured to deal with Milton in the same way, before the Royal Society of Literature. The opportunity of completing the trio was tempting, and I can only hope that I have not been tempted to too great a failure.

It is always in such a case as a ceremony desirable, though except as a ceremony it can hardly be necessary, to disclaim any intention of direct controversy. Such controversy would be, in this case, with the founder or re-founder of all recent discussion on the present subject, Mr Matthew Arnold[2]. I do not share his views: but controversy in detail would be quite out of place in such a paper as this, and, in reference to a dead antagonist, it would lack even the piquancy which, when carried on between the living, it seems to possess for many, I cannot say I think to the best,

[1] See General Preface. These three Grand Style Essays or Lectures may, from the circumstances of their origin, contain a very little repetition. But it seemed unnecessary to remove this (1923).

[2] See the lectures *On Translating Homer*.

tastes. It is sufficient to remind you that Mr Arnold could only accord to Shakespeare what I have elsewhere called a sort of "uncovenanted" Grand Style—an occasional magnificence, chequered if not checkmated by styles the reverse of grand. It appears to me on the contrary that Shakespeare held the Grand Style in the hollow of his hand, letting it loose or withholding it as good seemed to him: and further, that the seeming almost always *was* good.

It has been often said in various forms, but hardly ever without truth, that all dispute turns upon difference of definition—and that, if people were only clear-witted enough and even-tempered enough, the arrival at definition would be the conclusion of the whole matter. For their differences of opinion would either disappear in the process, or they would be seen to be irreconcilable, and to possess no common ground on which argument is possible. My definition of the Grand Style is certainly wider than Mr Arnold's, whose own seems to have been framed to insist upon that "high seriousness" of his which is no doubt a grand thing. Mine would, I think, come nearer to the Longinian "Sublime"—the perfection of expression in every direction and kind, the commonly called great and the commonly called small, the tragic and the comic, the serious, the ironic, and even to some extent the trivial (not in the worst sense, of course). Whenever this perfection of expression acquires such force that it transmutes the subject and transports the hearer or reader, then and there the Grand Style exists, for so long, and in such a degree, as the transmutation of the one and the transportation of the other lasts. It may persist, or cease, or disappear and reappear, like a fixed or a revolving light, but there it is *in essentia* or *in potentia*. If, on the other hand, you

limit the definition to the *continual* exertion of some such a transforming force, it seems to me that, in the first place, you are making an excessive and unnatural restriction, forgetful of *neque semper arcum* and other sayings of the wise, while, in the second place, as a consequence of the first error, you are preparing for yourself endless pitfalls. It is a question whether any writer, except perhaps Milton, will answer to the definition completely. Dante and Homer certainly will not—as, to give one example in each case out of a hundred, the comparison of Adam in the *Paradiso* to an animal struggling under a cloth, which has shocked so many commentators, and that passage in the *Odyssey* which shocked Longinus, will show. Further, the perpetual Grand Style of the definition which is *not* mine, can only be maintained—is only maintained by Milton himself—at the cost of an enormous *tour de force* of mannerism, which is at least questionably justifiable or artistic—which in fact itself sometimes becomes the reverse of grand. The vast region of the lighter vein must be abandoned, or clumsily handled—as it actually is by Milton when his Grand Style is once "set." Even in serious subjects, there must be a kind of "second sifting" of seriousness. And, above all, there is the certainty of the arising of a spurious Grand Style—a style of mere grandiosity—a plaster imitation of the real thing, than which there has been nothing in the past, and there is likely to be nothing in the future, more detestable.

Of this there is no danger, essentially at least, under the application of that definition of the Grand Style which I prefer. It makes its appearance when it is wanted, and when the hour is come; at other times it abides apart, and possesses its strength in quietness and in confidence, not frittering it away. Of its display

in this fashion I cannot remember any one in literature —not Homer, not Dante himself, not Milton certainly —who can produce such constant, such varied, such magnificent instances as Shakespeare. Even in his novitiate, when he was making his experiments, and indeed making the tools with which to make these, this Adamastor, this King of the Waves of the vasty deep of style, never fails to come when he calls on it. We do not know the exact order of his compositions; and there is dispute about some of the probably earlier items in it. Some maintain that the *Titus Andronicus* which we have is not the *Titus* that Meres attributed to him; and some that the admitted re-writing of *Love's Labour's Lost* makes it a doubtful witness; while the date of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is extremely uncertain. But it would, I think, be difficult so to pack a jury of competent scholars that these plays, and the *Comedy of Errors*, should not be put in the van. And though every one of them is full of crudities, the Grand Style appears in each, as it never does appear in any other probably contemporary work, except Marlowe's, and not as it appears in Marlowe himself. The central splendour of Adriana's speech in the *Errors* (II. ii. 112 ff.); the glorious "phrase of the ring" in the fatal discovery of the murder of Bassianus in *Titus* (II. iii. 226 ff.); the famous and incomparable veiled confession of Julia in the *Two Gentlemen* (IV. iv. 154 ff.); at least a dozen passages in *Love's Labour's Lost*—have the broad arrow—the royal mark—upon them unmistakably.

But, it is said, there is so much else—so much even of the close context of these very passages—which has *not* the mark! And why should it have? Poetry, and most especially dramatic poetry, is a microcosm: and it may—perhaps it should, like the macrocosm—

contain wood, hay, and stubble as well as gold and silver. Again, in these plays, it is said, there are *failures* of the Grand Style—slips from it or mis-shots at it—fallings into conceit, preciousness, bombast, frigidity, what not. Is it necessary, even at this time of day, to recapitulate the classes of persons to whom, according to the adage, half-done work should not be shown? Or is there any one, not included in these classes, who really wishes that we had not got Shakespeare's half-done work? I should be sorry to think that there is —especially in this audience. But, if there be, may I suggest to him that on the calculus we are using, the fact, supposing it to be a fact, does not matter? It is not a question whether anything that is not the Grand Style exists in these plays: but whether the Grand Style itself exists there. And I profess myself unable to understand how any one can deny its presence in the passages to which I have referred, and in scores, almost hundreds, of others.

But let us come to somewhat closer quarters. What is it, in these passages themselves, which, in spite of the evident novitiate of their author, claims for them grandeur of style? It is no one thing; the sources of the Sublime in style are many—as many as the qualities and circumstances of Style itself. Whenever one of these qualities is displayed, whenever one of these circumstances is utilised, in the transmuting and transporting fashion and degree—there is the Grand Style. In the speech of Julia, above referred to,

> She hath been fairer, Madam, than she is,

the secret lies, to a great extent, in the double meaning, and in the pathetic moderation and modulation of the disguised and deserted mistress. The language is quite plain—it is an instance, one of many, which shows that poetic diction is not a *sine qua non*, though none

of these shows that it can be or ought to be wholly dispensed with. But as I am, I confess, strongly and indeed irreconcilably opposed to the doctrine that the great thought *ipso facto* makes the Great Style—that the meaning is the thing—I am particularly glad to start with an instance where the secret *does* lie mainly in the meaning.

It lies there less in the passage of the *Errors*:

> For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
> A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
> And take unmingled thence that drop again,
> Without addition or diminishing,
> As take from me thyself, and not me too.

Here the meaning is good, is true, is pathetic—but it is not in it that the transport and the transmutation lie. They lie partly, as Longinus would assert, in the Figure—the vivid image of the breaking gulf, and the drop of water contrasted with and whelmed in it. They lie, I think, partly also in the actual verbal phrase by which that figure is conveyed. But to me they lie most in the management of the metre, the alternative check and rush of the rhythm of the now sundered, now overlapping, verses—the perfection of the entire phrase, prosodic and poetic.

The third passage, that in *Titus*, is more of a "Passage Perilous"; for the evidence of the novitiate is here very strong:

> Upon his bloody finger he doth wear
> A precious ring that lightens all the hole,
> Which, like a taper in some monument,
> Doth shine upon the dead man's earthy cheeks
> And shows the ragged entrails of the pit.

After this it goes off into mere failure about Pyramus and the moon, and Cocytus, and other gradus matters. Even here, in the lines quoted, the expression is not thoroughly "brought off"—it is the Grand Style in the rough, with the master's hand not yet in case to finish

it. Yet the solemn splendour of the opening line, and the lights and shades and contrasts of dim outline and ghastly colour, have the right quality—or at least the promise of it.

When we come to such a play as *Romeo and Juliet* the command of these sources is far surer and more frequent, though it seems to be masqued or marred, to some spectators, by the accompanying comedy or farce, which is not, and is not intended to be, grand in any way. The famous "Queen Mab" speech is not quite up to our mark—not at all because it is light in subject, but because Mercutio, pleasant as is his fancy, *does*, as Romeo says, "talk of nothing" to some extent, or talk a little too much of his pleasant something. But the famous later scenes of the play are full of the Grand Style; and Romeo's dying speeches, after he has disposed of Paris, have it in perfection and in rare volume. If anybody denies that this is the Grand Style I should like to meet him foot to foot, he taking any passage he likes from Homer, Dante, Milton or any one else, and to fight the question out, phrase by phrase, line by line, and total impression by total impression.

It is this increasing command of the style that transmutes the subject and transports the reader, which is so characteristic of Shakespeare; joined as it is to a perfect readiness *not* to use it when he thinks it is not required. I have pointed out that I think this somewhat misled Mr Arnold, and has misled others. They cannot conceive Apollo without the bent bow; they think that the Grand Style is a sort of panoply which the wearer, like some adventurous knights under a vow, must never take off. Once more, I cannot help thinking this is a mistake. "Homer and the Grand Style" is a subject which would be very interesting, and which I should not be afraid to handle; but it would be quite

irrelevant to say much of it here. The Homeric grandeur, whatever it is, is quite different in species from that of Dante and Milton; and though it is more like Shakespeare's, I do not think that the difference between the two is small. But it is certain that Homer does not wear his Grand Style as a continental officer wears his uniform, while Milton does this to the utmost possible extent, and Dante to an extent extremely great. Shakespeare—who is nothing if not English, except that he is also universal—is never more English than in his preference for mufti on occasion. It seems to be this preference which has, in the eyes of some, disqualified him.

And yet no one can wear his uniform with more dignity, or assume it with such lightning quickness; while no one can keep it longer fresh on duty. The *Sonnets* are, of course, the great example of this; for with the rarest exceptions the *Sonnets*, whatever else they may be or not be, are Grand Style throughout. Their subject does not, from the point of view, matter; whether Elizabethan sonnets in general, and these sonnets at a rather extraordinary particular, present rehandlings of old stuff, or not, is of no importance. Let fifty—let five hundred, or five thousand, people have moralled, poetically or prosaically on sunrise, noon, and sunset. When the fifty-first, or the five hundred and first, writes,

> Lo! in the *orient* when the *gracious* light
> Lifts up his *burning* head,

the Grand Style appears. It is nearly as impossible to describe, meticulously, the constituents of its grandeur as to describe those of the majesty of the sun itself. There is, as Dionysius of Halicarnassus was perfectly right in holding, something mysterious in the mere word-material—the contrasted sound and structure

of the words "orient," "gracious," "burning." There is much more in their juxtaposition. But there is most in the whole phrase; though with the contestable exception of "orient" and perhaps "Lo!" there is not a single specimen of "poetic diction" in it; most of it is in the simplest vocabulary; and the central thought and image are as common as grass or earth. But the *attitude* of the phrase is the thing; the simple dignified *attitude* which sets off, and is set off by "orient" and "gracious" and "burning," as jewels set off, and are set off by, simplicity and dignity and grace combined in the human port and bearing. It is in this that Shakespeare excels all his great competitors in quantity, and differs from all but Dante in quality. In Milton there is always something that is not exactly simple; and in Homer "perpetual epithets," compound epithets, and the like, interfere to some extent with that ever-varying yet often extraordinarily *plain* speech which we find in Shakespeare and in Dante. On the other hand, Milton is segregated from the other three by the fact that he depends less than any of them on mighty single words; it is rather (putting proper names out of the question) on the rhetorical collocation of those which he uses that he relies. The double epithets that he employs are imitations from the Greek. But Shakespeare delights in such words as "multitudinous," "incarnadine," "unwedgable," just as Dante does in such as *ammassiccia* and *fiammeggiante*. And yet Shakespeare can produce the Grand Style effect with five repetitions of "never" in a single line, or with such a renunciation of emphasis, such a miracle of negative expression, as "The rest is Silence." I suppose the very prodigality of his use of it, the insouciance of this prodigality, like that of

> Wealthy men who care not how they give,

and above all the disconcerting way in which he gives it when people do not expect it, and are not prepared for it, account to some extent for the dubiety and discomfort with which it has been and is received, for the tendency to plead "his time" and "the necessities of the theatre" and the like. For it is a great mistake to suppose that the day of apologies for Shakespeare is over. The form of the apology alters, but the fact remains: and I am inclined to think that Shakespeare, though he would certainly have been amused by most of his modern assailants, would have been still more amused by some of his modern apologists. Still, the "wilfulness" (as his own age would have said) of this prodigality *is* no doubt disconcerting to some honest folk. People are uncomfortable at being taken by surprise. They want to be told to "prepare to receive cavalry"; there must be a warning-bell and a voluntary, and ornaments and vestments, to put them into a proper Grand Style frame of mind. Milton provides all this, and he is recognised as a grand stylist; Shakespeare does not, and his title is questioned. A respectable but rather futile gentleman like Duke Orsino is plentifully supplied with the noblest phrase; a petulant, dishonourable, almost worthless prince like Richard II is supplied more plentifully still, and from a still nobler mint. He does not grudge it to his villains; if

> The wheel is come full circle; I am here[1]

be not in the Grand Style, I confess myself utterly ignorant what the Grand Style is. It comes sometimes, as it were, "promiscuously" in the vulgar sense of that term. It would, for instance, be exceedingly difficult for the most expert, or the most futile, ingenuity of the commentator to assign an exact reason for the occurrence, where it occurs, of what is perhaps the

[1] *King Lear*, v. iii. 174.

grandest example of the Grand Style in all literature—the words of Prospero to Ferdinand, when the revels are ended. An excuse is wanted to break off the pretty "vanity of his art"; to get rid of the lovers; and to punish, in defeating it, the intentionally murderous but practically idle plot of Caliban and his mates. Anything would do; and the actual pretext is anything or nothing. But Shakespeare chooses to accompany it with a "criticism of life"—and of more than life—so all-embracing, couched in expression of such magnificence, that one knows not where to look for its like as form and matter combined. An ordinary man, if, *per impossible*, he could have written it, would have put it at the end; an extraordinary one might have substituted it for, or added it to, the more definite announcement of abdication and change which now comes later with "Ye elves," etc. Shakespeare puts it here.

Sometimes he will even outrage the Mrs Grundy of criticism by almost burlesquing the Grand Style, by letting Titania, in her deluded courtship of Bottom, be not merely graceful and fanciful, and pathetically pleading, but by making her indulge in such positive magnificence, such sheer Sublime as

> The Summer still doth tend upon my state,

which the most serious poet, telling the severest tale, might be only too happy to have invented. At other times—the examples are frequent in the probably rehandled chronicle-plays—he will take another man's phrase which is not grand at all, and "grandee" it—equip it with the Orders of the King, and the qualifications necessary to justify them—by a stroke or two of added or altered diction. Constantly it seems as though a sort of whim took him to be grand—or as if (in the words of one of his own characters who is too graceless

for the strictly Grand Style, though grand enough in his own fashion) "*grandeur* lay in his way and he found it." Some of these characters—Hamlet for one, of course, and Macbeth for another—would speak habitually in it if they had not more grace of congruity than to do so. There is no one who has it more perfectly than Antony—unless it be Cleopatra—when either chooses; and Othello at his best excels almost all others. Once more, if his last words be not in the Grand Style, where are we to look for it?

But the old *aporia*—the old curious fallacy-objection—recurs. "These things *are* grand—but there is so much else that is *not* grand." To this there is, once more, only the old answer to all fallacy-objections of the kind. "Why not?" I suspect that the fallacy arises, as so many æsthetic fallacies do, from a confusion of Arts. It is sometimes forgotten that literature, especially in some of its forms, is much more of a macrocosm than any of its sister species of Imitation. The greater epic, the novel, and especially the drama, have got to face and reproduce life, character, action, circumstance, in all their varieties, foul as well as fair, trivial as well as dignified, commonplace as well as exceptional. To attempt to clothe all this in the same Grand Style, or in the Grand Style at all, is to offend against the sumptuary laws of Art itself. The so-called classical drama of modern time has made this attempt; and the wiser judgment of the best periods of criticism has decided that it has failed. Poetry at large tried to do it for a century and a half or thereabouts, and failed even more egregiously. Prose fiction never really succeeded until it cast the attempt aside. I have boldly confessed that I do not think Dante did attempt it; and that, though Milton certainly did, and achieved perhaps the only success on record, he paid for it

somewhat dearly, and could not have attained what success he did attain but for the extremely exceptional nature of his subject. Further, I think that, in certain notorious passages, he actually tried to get out of the Grand Style—without succeeding in getting into anything else good. Your short poem, like your sculpture or your picture, is all the better for being Grand Style unmixed; not so your long one, and still less your drama. Thus, Shakespeare himself never deserts the Grand Style in the *Sonnets*, or indeed in any of his poems, except—and then not always—songs in the plays of such a character that grandeur would be almost or wholly out of place. In his plays themselves he suits style to subject, and so alternates Grand Style with that which is not grand.

But the grandeur of its grandeur when it is grand! And the inexhaustible variety of it, and of the means whereby it is attained! I believe I was once rash enough to assert that you could not open a double page of the *Globe* edition—which means something more than two hundred lines—(excepting of course the prose passages, the plays only partially Shakespeare's and those dealing with purely comic matter) without coming on something unmistakably in the Grand Style. To justify this boast "at the foot of the letter" would no doubt be difficult, seeing that there are something like five hundred such page-openings. But in such experiments as I have made—and they are numerous—I have very rarely drawn the cover blank, and have frequently "found" where, from the subject and context, finding was unlikely.

This ubiquity of the Shakespearian Grand Style, as combined and contrasted with its abstinence from continuity, is one of its most notable characteristics, and is connected in the closest degree with that absence

of mannerism which has been noted. The extreme difficulty of defining or even describing Shakespeare's style has been alike the theme, and the despair of the commentators; it extends to, and is intensified in the case of, his *Grand* Style. The ticketing critics who were so common in classical times, and who are not unknown in modern, would be—some of the latter have been—hopelessly "out" with him. You cannot fix on any special collocation of words like Milton's adoption and extension of the Chaucerian epithet before and after the noun; on any tricks of grammar like Milton's apposition; on any specially favourite words such as those to be found in the most diverse writers. It seems as if he had deliberately determined that no special mould, no particular tool, no *recipe* of mixture and arrangement, should be capable of being pointed out as his secret, or even as one of his secrets, of attaining grandeur. It has been remarked already that the subject, or at least the context of subject, hardly matters. But other things matter as little. Any vocabulary; any syntax; any rhetoric, will do for Shakespeare to produce his masterpieces; and it may sometimes seem as if—like conjurors very often and chemists sometimes—he had taken a sort of whimsical delight in producing his effects with the minimum of apparatus, or with apparatus of the least formal kind.

You may find curious instances of this in the very forefront of his work as it is read, though it may have been his last completed task. Take those two well-known lines of Prospero's,

> In the dark backward and abysm of Time,

and

> To act her earthy and abhorred commands.

Now a hasty critic may dismiss the most obvious device by which the style is raised in these as merely the old

trick, familiar for generations before Shakespeare, and already almost caricatured by men like Fisher and Berners—the trick of combining native and imported elements. But there is something much more than a mere draft on the Teutonic and Romance columns of a conveniently arranged Dictionary of Synonyms. The double source *is* drawn upon; "backward" and "earthy" do stand to "abysm" and "abhorred" as the pairs so familiar in Bible and Prayer-book do to each other. But Shakespeare is not content with this grammar-school antithesis. In the first place, he varies the meaning in "backward" and "abysm," giving waste horizontal stretch in the one case and unplumbed depth in the other; and he also contrasts the mere sound of the words as much as possible, while deliberately adopting the form in "ysm" for the sake of euphony. In the second he adds to the contrast of origin and sound a complete change of point of view. "Earthy" is a quality of the commands; "abhorred" an attitude of the mind commanded. He has tapped not one but many of the Longinian "sources"; he has blended the products of his tapping. And yet these are mere every-day instances, the *ordinaire*, as it were, of his cellar.

Pass from the almost certainly last to one of the certainly earliest plays, the *Two Gentlemen*, and avoiding the apex already quoted from it, taking (at whatever may be their full value) the imperfect construction, the more imperfect characterization, the superabundant evidences of the novitiate in conceit and word-play and trifling—consider for a moment one line of its second greatest passage (I. iii. 84),

The uncertain glory of an April day.

"Quite commonplace," says the quite commonplace reader. "Everybody knows that April days are uncertain." But has everybody called them so in this

simplicity and consummateness of phrase? Try obvious variants:

The fickle glory of an April day,

or "the treacherous," or "the passing," or a dozen others, not to mention the non-obvious ones which would have commended themselves to second- or tenth-rate writers of that day and this—far-fetched and dear-bought frigidities which will suggest themselves by the dozen. Then do the same thing with "glory," substituting "splendour," "beauty," what you will. Put all the results of experiment beside the actual text, and you will, if you have a Grand Style ear, have very little difficulty in determining where the Grand Style lies—with Ariel and the bee, not beside the lamp and in the chemist's shop.

To go all through the plays, even by sample at fancy, would be impossible; but it may perhaps be permitted to me to give a few more of my *sortes Shakespearianæ*. I shall avoid, as I have avoided, except by general reference, the most famous passages—for there is no need to have recourse to them, and the means by which their effects are achieved, though always different in individual, are never different in general character from those manifest in the smaller instances—if any can be called small. The most general touch of all is perhaps that already noticed—the *ambidexterity* with which the poet uses the most and the least unusual phrases and words. He has neither a studied grandiloquence nor a studied simplicity, nor does he specially affect that peculiar source of sublimity—that is to say, "transport"—which consists in a sort of catachresis or deliberate misuse of words in secondary intentions, like that frequently adopted by Sir Thomas Browne. He will at one moment write a phrase "to tear with thunder the wide cheeks of the air," which has the

very sound-effect of which it speaks, and which has the largeness of the universe itself, with metrical accompaniments to match; and then he will pass in the same speech from this poetical magnificence to the plain downright scorn of

> This fellow had a Volscian to his mother[1].

He will write, using the simplest words and most familiar metre,

> Fear no more the heat of the sun
> Nor the furious winter's rages,

producing, it appears, on some people the effect of "drivel"—certainly producing on others the effect of the most perfect and poignant poetry of ordinary life. And then, within a page or two, he will sketch a picture of war in a line and a half, with a couple of images of sound and sight that could not be beaten in effect by a paragraph, or another page:

> That when they hear the Roman horses neigh,
> Behold their quartered fires—

where the absence of superfluity, and the presence of concentration, are equally remarkable[2]. For my part, if I had any doubt about Shakespeare having a hand in *Pericles*, one line would settle it—

> A terrible childbed hast thou had, my dear[3].

For even Middleton or Webster, the two who have come nearest to Shakespearian phraseology, could hardly have achieved this curious union of simplicity and the Grand Style; while Cyril Tourneur, who has been thought by some to have the touch, certainly could not have achieved it.

Nor is it less interesting to examine the passages which—not of the greatest as wholes; not containing any of the actual "jewels five words long" which are

[1] *Coriolanus*, v. iii. 178.
[2] *Cymbeline*, iv. ii. 258; iv. 17.
[3] *Pericles*, iii. i. 57.

so plentiful; not exempt, it may be, from the less grand marks of the form and pressure of the time, in conceit and euphuism and absence of restraint—still betray this Grand Style of Shakespeare's. Take, for instance, that in some ways most Shakespearian of all the plays *not* greatest—*Timon of Athens*. The central situation is, of course, dramatic enough; but it is not perhaps one which lends itself to effective dramatic treatment of the Shakespearian kind, because there is not sufficient development of character; while it *does* lend itself to that Shakespearian divagation and promiscuity of handling which, though they do not disturb some of us, seem to disturb others so much. But the play is simply drenched with the Grand Style—every rift is packed with Grand Style gold—not, it may be, refined to the point of the greatest, but gold unmistakable. It peeps out of the rhetorical commonplaces of the professional cynic Apemantus:

> Like madness is the glory of this life,
> As this pomp shows to a little oil and root,

where the first verse at least is perfect[1]. Alcibiades—in Shakespeare's scheme not the Admirable Crichton of some views of him, if not of history, but only a rather good specimen of professional soldier—has vouchsafed to him that splendid cadence—

> Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye
> On thy low grave, on faults forgiven. Dead
> Is noble Timon[2].

The excellent Flavius—best of servants, but certainly not most poetical of men—is made mouthpiece of that glorious line—

> O! the fierce wretchedness that glory brings us[3].

As for Timon himself, his misfortunes make him a

[1] *Timon of Athens*, I. ii. 139.
[2] *Ibid.* V. iv. 78.
[3] *Ibid.* IV. ii. 30.

Shakespeare. Even the first frantic retrospect of cursing on Athens is, till the rhyme comes at least, a Grand Style raving. The address to "the blessed breeding sun" is greater still; and the better known demonstration of the universality of thieving is raised by the style, despite its desperate quaintness, almost to the level of the greatest things in *Hamlet*.

The fact is, ladies and gentlemen, that this Grand Style is not easily tracked or discovered by observation, unless you give yourself up primarily to the *feeling* of it. You cannot tell how it arises, and you will often have some difficulty in deciding why it goes. It is the truest, precisely because it is the most irresponsible, of the winds of the spirit—no trade wind or Etesian gale, but a breeze that rises and falls, if not exactly as *it* listeth—as the genius of the poet and the occasions of the subject list. We may recur once more—in the useful, not the useless, fashion of comparison, the fashion which appraises qualities, but does not ticket values—to the four names which, in Literature, have been most frequently associated with this Style. Homer has it in a form scarcely comparable with the others. If we had more early Greek epic—more especially if we had Antimachus—we should be much better judges of the Homeric Grand Style than we are. As it is, we see in it extraordinary and extraordinarily varied melody of verse and phrase, a use of Figure, especially of Simile, which is unsurpassed, and to which indeed all subsequent literary poetry is directly or indirectly indebted; and one great engine, the elaborate and mostly perpetual epithet, which is a great puzzle to cautious and widely experienced critics. For the ancients will not tell us exactly how these epithets affected them; and we ought to know, lest we make the same mistakes which, as we see, foreigners are constantly making

about English, and which, no doubt, Englishmen as frequently make about foreign literature.

We are safer with Dante, for there we have practically all possible facilities of comparison. The language is still living; we know what those who have spoken and written it since thought and think about it; and we have our own independent, but in this case fully informed, judgment to be the sovereign guide. We find that there is undoubtedly a *prevalent* style in Dante: and that this is of a peculiar *gravity*, the gravest style perhaps in all literature, yet in no sense stiff or stilted, and not (to some tastes) at all affected. But it seems, to some at least, that this style is very largely influenced, and even to some considerable extent produced, by the metre—which is of an intense idiosyncrasy, and though not in the least monotonous, curiously uniform in general atmosphere—much more so indeed than the Greek hexameter, and quite infinitely more so than the English blank verse. We find, further, that Dante has no exclusive preference for lofty images or even expressions: and that though he will use the most elaborate and carefully-sifted poetic-pictorial diction, his Grand Style is not so much a matter of that as of the suffused atmosphere or *aura* spoken of above. There is in fact, in the old sense of the word as applied to music, a Dantesque *mode*—pervading everything and affecting grotesque, extravagance, pedantry—(these are not *my* words, but such as others use)—almost or quite as much as the grander parts themselves. Breaking chronological order, for obvious reasons, we come to Milton, and here again we find something all-pervading. But its nature is different: and so is the nature of its pervasion. It is practically independent of metre—for the peculiarity of blank verse is that it imposes no character of its own, but

takes that of its writer—"blankness" in the worst sense; the "tumid gorgeousness" which Johnson, not without some excuse, mistook for its differentia; or a varied magnificence in the best and strictest sense of that word, which knows no limit and accepts no rule. The Miltonic style is quite above the Miltonic metre in one sense of "above" though hardly in another; it is perceivable almost equally in the complicated stanza of the "Nativity," in the octo-syllables of the early middle poems, in the rhymed blank verse of *Lycidas*, in the pure blank verse of the *Paradises*, in the dialogues and the chorics of *Samson*. It admits variety; but here also, *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. I do not know that we can free it from the label of affectation; though it is affectation transcendentalized and sublimed. The proof is that it cannot descend and unbend as Dante's can. But we are not talking at length of Milton here. Suffice it to say that this undoubted uniformity, with the less universal but somewhat similar uniformity of Dante, which no doubt patterned it, and the quite different uniformity of Homer, undoubtedly helped to create the idea of a Grand Style existing almost *ab extra*, and bound to present itself separately, at demand, everywhere, for everything.

To this idea Shakespeare is certainly rebel; if a manner so absolutely aristocratic as his can even admit the suggestion of rebellion. Milton he cannot be for many reasons, including the fact that he has to go before Milton can come; Dante he does not choose to be; Shakespeare he is. And as being Shakespeare—in order, indeed, to make what we mean by Shakespeare —he uses the Grand Style as his Attendant Spirit. He says to it, "Come," and it comes; he says to it, "Go," and it goes. It is not his master, as to some extent their

styles were the masters both of Dante and of Milton. He does not make it his mistress, as not a few hardly lesser men have done—caressing it; doing homage to it; and never letting it out of his sight if he can help. Sometimes he seems almost wilfully and capriciously to give it its *congé*—to take up with inferior creatures for pastime. But this is a delusion. He knows that to employ a being so majestical for every purpose of a dramatic household is a profanation—that she is for the pageants and the passions, for the big wars and the happy or unhappy loves, for the actions and the agonies of pith and moment. For the rest, the hand-maidens and the serving-men, the clowns and the fools, the Osrics and the Poloniuses will do; though he will not grudge even to them, when it suits him, a touch of the higher language, a flash of the sublimer thought. To this you must make up your mind, if you go a Grand-Styling with Shakespeare.

There is no fear, as I said before, of drawing the covers blank. Take for our last instance that strange play—so puzzling in many ways, so offensive, I believe, to some good folk, such a mixture of almost the highest Shakespeare and almost the most ordinary University Wit—take *Troilus and Cressida*. Neglect, while to this or that extent acknowledging—for, if you cannot combine acknowledgment and neglect in this way, you may be an excellent neighbour and a very good bowler, but you are no critic—neglect the disappointment in the handling of some of the characters, the confused action, the uncomely patches. Neglect further—or rather do not neglect, but use only as a contrast and foil—the tale of bombasted blank verse and craggy conceited phrase as it seems to some. Postpone for consideration the jumble (I am here speaking throughout the language of the Advocatus Diaboli) of long-

winded tirades and word-playing prose. What remains in your sieve—your crucible—your gold-washing cradle? Not merely the famous "One touch of nature" which has been so frequently and so curiously misinterpreted. Not merely the less generally known but hardly inferior beauties of that same magnificent speech which begins—

> Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,

and ends—

> Made emulous missions 'mongst the Gods themselves
> And drave great Mars to faction[1].

This singular throwing into dramatic form of the ordinary Troy-books perpetually develops Grand Style; the commonplaces of Nestor and the other chiefs break into it in the same odd fashion in which an apparently quiet wave, hardly undulating the surface a little way from shore, will break on the beach itself with a sudden burst of glittering thunder. It is extraordinary how the γνῶμαι, the "sentences" (as Greek and Latin rhetoricians would have called them) of the great debating Third Scene of the First Act stick in one's memory. The play itself is never acted; never used for those official purposes which, I fear, make other parts of Shakespeare best known to us both in youth and age; nor is it in all ways seductive to private reading. Yet the Grand Style impression is made constantly: though with that singular diversity and elusiveness of means, direct and suggested, to which attention has been drawn throughout. Take this:

> There is seen
> The baby figure of the giant mass
> Of things to come at large[2].

That is no bad instance of what may be called the middle or average Shakespearian Grand Style—per-

[1] *Troilus and Cressida*, III. iii. 145 ff. [2] *Ibid.* I. iii. 345.

haps indeed it is a little below the average. It is all the better example. The poet takes, you see, the most ordinary words—the actual vocabulary of the phrase is not above even Wordsworthian proof. He takes for figure an equally ordinary antithesis—"baby" and "giant"—though a different writer would probably have spoilt his own farther chances by using "pygmy" or "dwarf," instead of "baby." And here he gets his first hold on us; for the baby, unlike the dwarf, will grow—though whether it will grow to giant size or not, only the Future can tell. Then he thinks of something else—"figure" and "mass" being not, like "baby" and "giant," contrasts of size merely, but indicating the form, the idea, that is to be impressed on the mass. And then he is not satisfied with the limited greatness of "giant mass" itself; but expands and flings it out into the obscure infinity of things to come, and of things to come *at large*. You have passed in some dozen or sixteen words, artfully selected, from the definite doll of the baby figure to the vast of Space and Time.

This may seem a fanciful sermon on a more fancifully selected text; but I venture to hope that it may induce some who have not yet thought on the matter to take not uninteresting views of the Grand Style in general and of Shakespeare's Grand Style in particular. They will not find these views easily exhaustible: all the less so because all really Grand Style appeals to a certain complementary gift and faculty in the person who is to appreciate it; it is a sort of infinitely varying tally, which awaits and adjusts itself to an infinite number of counter-pieces. It abides; the counter-pieces may get themselves ready as they can and will.

VI

MILTON AND THE GRAND STYLE

I NEED hardly assure you that I have no intention of making the title of this paper a text for reviving the great Arnoldian battle on the question "What *is* the grand style, and who, exactly, are the poets entitled to be credited with it?" This question—unsettled in fifty years and unlikely to be settled in five hundred—complicated, moreover, by Mr Arnold's special definitions and applications, would be most inappropriate to the present occasion[1]. But it is not inappropriate—it is, on the contrary, most appropriate to that occasion—to deal with a different and hardly contentious side of the matter. The Grand Style, in its widest and highest sense, may be said to include those forms of expression—in our present connection those forms of *poetic* expression mainly, though not excluding prose—which are specially suitable to what, from the famous treatise whose authorship is still debated, we call "The Sublime." To do this it must possess characteristics akin to the Sublime itself. It must go beyond the commonplace and the prosaic in the bad sense; it must stop short of the bombastic and the extravagant. Now it is practically admitted by all but paradoxers and crotcheteers, or persons honestly, but unfortunately, deficient in the necessary literary sense, that Milton possesses this style, whosoever else may or may not possess it, and whatsoever conditions it may or may not be reasonable to attach to the grant of the possession in general. It is the purpose of this brief

[1] As mentioned in Preface, the Milton Tercentenary, the paper being read before the Royal Society of Literature.

paper to enquire into some of these conditions under which he seems to possess it—in particular to see how he is distinguished from others who also admittedly possess it, by relinquishing or adopting certain means for its attainment—to endeavour in short to discover some of the characteristics of *his* grand style in the concrete, avoiding the perilous and rather unnecessary question what may be the characteristics of *the* grand style in the abstract.

Of the characteristics that are certainly his, the most obvious are naturally the most important in one way, the least in another. They are most important because they, more than anything else, have coloured the general conception of the Miltonic quality, and because they have been usually imitated by those who have followed him. They are least important because they, almost of necessity, produce only an external and superficial grandeur or grace. Yet they certainly, even putting the imitators and the general aside, are not to be passed over lightly. That great critic whom I shall still take the liberty of calling Longinus, admits among the five sources or fountains of the Sublime something which his translators render very variously, but which, translated as closely as possible, comes to this: "the quality of the writer's handling of *figures* —figures of speech as well as figures of thought." Now one is sometimes tempted to a slight impatience of the introduction of these apparently mechanical things, which, indeed, are in ancient criticism nearly as much of a nuisance as certain catchwords—varying, of course, from time to time—are in modern. But this impatience may be—perhaps all impatience always is—unwise. Longinus was always the very last critic to submit to the merely mechanical; and infinitely insubordinate as the free human spirit is in details, it cannot help obeying

certain general forms in its operations which, in this particular sphere, may be called figures if anybody pleases. They may be called by many other names—by many other names men actually do call them—as, for instance, when they do not like them "mannerisms," "tricks," "rhetorical devices"—when they do like them "secrets of art," "masteries of craftsmanship," and the like. That they exist—exist eminently and prominently, almost flagrantly—in Milton, nobody would dream of denying. And though I do not propose to invite your principal attention to them they cannot be quite passed over. For they certainly have to do—have a very great deal to do—with the Miltonic style: and if the Miltonic style is even only one form of the grand style, nothing that has to do with the Miltonic style can be thought altogether alien from the grand.

Take, for instance, such a well-known thing as the habit—as old as Chaucer, but brought to a pitch of prominence and perfection by Milton—of employing two epithets and putting one before and one after the noun, as in "cany waggons light," and "sad occasion dear." This is a figure beyond all question—it might almost be called a figure with a vengeance, for at first sight nothing can appear more arbitrarily mechanical, more purely tricky. "What can it matter," says the plain man who prides himself on regarding all consideration of such things as pedantic fiddle-faddle "whether you put the epithets together, or apart, or before, or (except that it is unusual) after?" Well, perhaps there is no reason: though this "perhaps" is only to be granted for the sake of argument. The fact remains that it does matter—matters very much. And, perhaps again, that "unusualness" is one of the reasons. Perhaps there must always be something of unusual-

ness in the grand style: not merely Longinus, but Aristotle, who is not generally supposed to have been a patron of the eccentric and the bizarre, thought so. When Wordsworth, and Mr Arnold himself, argued in the opposite sense, and quoted certain great passages in their favour, they forgot that usualness may be unusual—familiarity unfamiliar—if the poet knows how to make it so. But that is something of a digression. It is certain that "cany waggons light" is not the usual arrangement—that it is very effective—that, in the context especially, it does help the sublimity, the grandeur, the consummateness-in-the-circumstances, of the style. For "consummateness *in the circumstances*" is, I think, about as safe and probable a definition of the indefinable as may be in the case of our grand style. Nor, if any one thinks "Chineses" and their "waggons" too slight for such a style, can he find the same fault with "sad occasion dear" or with many other exercises of this well-known device. Like all such devices, it can be abused: and like most of them it tempts the imitators to abuse it. Nothing is more common in intentional or unintentional burlesques of our poet: and especially when it is combined with a travesty of his Latinisms, it can be very terrible. Perhaps never did a true poet in a great poem admit such a deformity as the "excoriate forks deform" in Cowper's *Yardley Oak*. But we all know that the best things, misused, become the worst.

Another well-known and still commoner device, actually efficacious in producing the sublime, possibly so in producing something almost ridiculous, is the Miltonic apposition. Nothing can be finer or more effective than this in such cases as

> And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old.

But the parodists seized on it at once: and there is nothing

more effective in another way than the adjustment of it to the purposes of parody in *The Splendid Shilling*, and all its best successors: nothing less grateful than some serious abuses of it by Thomson and the other mid-eighteenth century writers "in the manner of Milton."

For this is the danger of all mechanical or merely physical things—that their use or abuse, their beneficent or maleficent effect, does not lie in themselves. The flame will torture and disfigure and destroy as readily as it will give light and warmth: the steel will take the life of the innocent as effectively and as ruthlessly as that of the guilty. Another ancient critic, with less soul in him than Longinus, but with about as much sense as ever critic had (Quintilian), observed that it was sometimes hard to distinguish faults from figures of speech. Nothing is more certain, that it is exceedingly possible, and exceedingly easy, to use figures so that they shall be faults. Yet they remain a "source of the sublime" as well as a source of other things down to the ridiculous: and I should not wonder if the famous "one step" adage suggested itself to the first person who used it, in direct connection with this habit of regarding figures as sublime-producing machinery. Yet Milton could certainly make them so: he did make them so in these and other instances which it would take too long to enumerate, and which would be absolutely impossible to describe or discuss on the present occasion. Perhaps, indeed, no author would have been more eagerly seized upon by Longinus himself to justify his inclusion of this source of sublimity.

Let us go a step higher. There will, I suppose, be very little dispute about the extraordinary lift given to Milton's style by his power to handle, and his constant handling of language in a way less "mechanical"

(since we have used the word) than that just discussed; hardly mechanical at all, some would say, and I should agree with them; but still a matter of pure style. This is his selection, his moulding, his collocation of phrase and rhythm so as to clothe the verse with the fullest accompaniment of poetical music. I am not now proposing to enter upon any matter strictly prosodic. I know that there are a good many people who do not want to hear about such matter at all: and I have endeavoured to say what I have to say, to people who do want to hear about it, elsewhere. The Johnstones and the Maxwells, the Caravats and the Shanavests, the Big-Endians and the Little-Endians of Miltonic prosody may agree heartily on the point with which I am now occupied. Here at least Milton avails himself of the most *obviously* mechanical means of producing grandeur and grace, less than almost any poet of whom we have record except Shakespeare. Nobody can put Dante higher than I do; in a moment you will see that in some respects I think Milton his inferior. But there can be no doubt that Dante owes a great deal to his happy selection, once for all, of the interrhymed tercet. Of course he has brought out the virtue of it as no one else has done: but that virtue is, as in the case of some other metres, to a great extent, intrinsic and *immanent*—at your command but not exactly *you*, or given by you. The same is the case with the Spenserian, with the *In Memoriam* metre, with rhyme-royal—perhaps with others. You have got to be the magician to set the spirit at work: but when it does work its accomplishment is, to a certain extent, its own and not yours. Now there is no spirit in the whole range of the poetical hierarchy more potent than blank verse: but its potency is the least automatic of all, the most dependent on the continued guidance and

commands of the poet himself. And he must give this guidance and these commands not merely by way of estimable subject and worthy moral idea. What a chain of "extremely valuable thoughts" will come to in blank verse when no care is taken to lighten it by phrase and rhythm, and word-music, and word-colour—what a mere galley-slave load of rusty iron it becomes, Wordsworth himself has taught us only too well. I have never doubted that Milton's determination towards blank verse, and before that final determination his selection of the curious "rhymed blank verse," as it has been called, in which he clothed perhaps his greatest single and moderate-sized poetical achievement—*Lycidas*—was the result of his consciousness of and his confidence in his powers. He knew that he could manage phrase and rhythm in the grand manner so as to suffice for the attainment of a consummate poetic style. It was an adventure in the fashion of those romances, the blessed paths among which even his elder feet never forgot, though they might actually sometimes wander in worse places—a gage to hold bridge or pass without shield or helmet, with sword only or only spear, as against the full armour of other poets. That he did it, first with only a modified and very limited use of rhyme and a vague and indefinite one of stanza, then with neither stanza nor rhyme at all, everybody knows; how he did it, at least in great part, I have no doubt. It was by the grandeur and grace of style obtained mainly, if not wholly, through the means which we are now more particularly to notice.

For myself, I should want, outside of Dante and Shakespeare and Aeschylus and Lucretius, no better example of the grand style in poetry than *Lycidas* itself. For variety of grandeur, I do not think you can

find any passage of equal length in the *Paradises* to match it: and if the selection surprises any one, I fear he must be under the delusion which, according to Schlegel, some one was witty enough to ascribe to Burke—that "the Sublime is a grenadier with very large whiskers." Even the too famous outburst of sectarianism—to which I have the strongest personal objection as a matter of history and opinion, and which some of the stanchest of Milton's admirers have admitted to be an error of taste and art—seems to me, for all that, not to lose grandeur of form. And why? Because the supremacy of expression and phrase and verse remains—the discord and the declension, even to those who find them such, are in the sentiment only.

I do not know whether any one has ever been rash enough, or perverse enough, to attempt to "set" *Lycidas*. He would deserve penal servitude for life with two barrel organs playing different tunes, out of time, under the windows of his cell—if only for the utter superfluity of his naughtiness. Even if, *per impossibile*, a musical accompaniment could be composed that should not jar with the piece, it must necessarily drown, or at least draw attention from, the poetical music which this grandeur of style gives and includes inevitably in itself. We know from the Cambridge MS. what pains Milton took with the composition in the smallest details: and we know likewise that his alterations and selections of alternative were (what is by no means invariably the case when poets alter and select) almost always decided improvements. All of them, I think it may be said without rashness, tend in the direction of still further exalting this grandeur of style by word and sound-arrangement, colour, outline. In one of the very grandest passages

of all, one of the most perfect phrases in English poetry—

> Sleepst by the fable of Bellerus old
> Where the great vision of the guarded mount
> Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold—

we know, for instance, that he had at first written "Corineus," a name just as good in itself as "Bellerus," well known to most of his probable readers in the fables of the chroniclers who had the monopoly of the history of England, but, as it happens, concerting, symphonising, less well with the rest of the passage in sound. So he justly coined "Bellerus" from "Belerium," and gave him an extra *l* "for love and for euphony" as a christening gift.

There are other points about this triplet too well known for emphasising, now and here in particular: but it may well serve as text for a few words on that mighty engine of grandeur of style in the use of which no one has ever surpassed Milton—the employment of proper names. No device of his that touches style is more celebrated; none, perhaps, has been more violently disliked by those who cannot taste him. His conscious reasons for adopting it may be variously guessed at. There were the concurrent examples of the ancients whom he revered and the mediæval writers whom he really loved—for there never was, in all literature, such a blend of Classic and Romantic as Milton. There was the foible of the age—and not a bad foible either—for the putting in evidence of learning—for giving, as it were, key- and catch-words which brother students might recognise, and which might awake in them, as in himself, pleasant trains of association and remembrance. There was the delight in a wide survey of times and countries, of looking back to the famous men our fathers that were before us—of

knitting his own literature to the literature of Spenser and Ariosto, of Dante and Petrarch, of all the great poets and prosemen of ancient times. But the master inducement must have been really, whatever it was consciously, the power and beauty of the words themselves—the combination of attractive strangeness, freedom from vulgarity, and intrinsic harmony. You will never find Milton bringing in an ugly name: he would have agreed with Boileau there, though he would have had nothing of Boileau's arbitrary and finical notions as to what was ugly. And so he scatters the light and colour and music of these names all over his verse—seeming to grow fonder and fonder of the practice as he grows older, from the consummate but not lavish examples of it in *Lycidas* itself down to the positive revels of nomenclature—geographical, mythological, romantic—which are to be found in *Paradise Regained*.

But Milton does not depend on these "purple stripes that give brightness to the dress" things that, as such and in the phrase just used, even the sober taste of Quintilian approved. His "common vocabulary"—a "common" which is made so uncommon,—is as grand as his "proper," and the grandeur is by no means always achieved by unusual diction in individual words, though it sometimes is. His oddities of spelling —"sovran," "harald," "murtherer," and the rest—conduce very little to it, if, indeed, they are not something of a drawback, as freaks of this kind always are. But his selection of words and his arrangement of them are simply consummate: and nothing could better illustrate and confirm the famous doctrine of Longinus that beautiful words are the very light of thought, or the still more audaciously thoroughgoing principle of Dionysius of Halicarnassus that you can trace the

source of beautiful style right down or up to beautiful *letters*. Let us open—it cannot be opened too often—our *Lycidas* yet once more. It is true that there is such a blaze of the grand style all through it that it is difficult to isolate any particular ray: or rather to select any particular ray for isolation and analysis. But the difficulty only arises from their number, and the unbroken succession of them. Take almost the earliest —that of the second line. He wants to tell us that myrtle withers and that ivy is evergreen. It is not all-important, but it is connected with the theme and not a mere decorative addition; it is worthy of the grand style, and it has it.

Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere

summons to its mere contrast of natural fact the aid of the most cunning contrast of vowel sound and arrangement of rhythm. Look down a few lines and find the phrases which tip each line for four running —"*lofty* rhyme," "*watery* bier," "*parching* wind," "*melodious* tear." "Oh," says the objector, "anybody can pile on adjectives." Yes; but can anybody pile on *these* adjectives? In a certain other school the "*gradus* epithet" is a well-known ornamental addition. You can often, if not most often, take it away without spoiling the sense, or substitute half a dozen others without much affecting that sense. Here you cannot. "Lofty" keys on directly and almost inevitably to "build" which has come before; "watery" is necessary to the occasion, "parching" independently of its value as sound is wanted as a contrast to "watery," and "melodious" tear is hardly a mere epithet at all. It expresses "tears *with* melody"—the melody of lament and regret. That is how the grand style uses epithets: and how the *gradus* does not suggest their use.

Again, alliteration, it sometimes has been held, is

a childish thing—perhaps worse—a foolish and tawdry bedizenment. Is it? Try, for instance, such a phrase as—

The swart star sparely looks.

Try it without the alliteration—

The fierce star rarely looks.

Try it with the adverb which Milton himself once thought of substituting—"stintly"; try it with anything but this cunning variation of the same "s" alliteration with a different subsidiary consonant and the almost more cunning selection of the different values of the same vowel. Your ear, if you happen to possess one, will tell you of the heavy change.

Try "the *embattled* mount" (an excellent phrase in itself) for "the guarded mount" in the passage cited above. Cut off

Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore

(it is not needed in sense) from the verse paragraph to which it belongs and see what *that* change does. Roll over on the palate of your mind such expressions as "*Clear* Spirit," "*Broad* rumour." Weigh, measure, adjust to each other, and consider the adjustment of such words as the constituents of the line—

To scorn delights and live laborious days.

You will begin, I suspect, to think more nobly of the Dionysian "beautiful letters" than to hold them the mere "rhetoricians' tools" which they have often been considered: and you will estimate them at their due worth as constituents, in their turn, of the grand style. And if contrast is wanted, take what some, I believe, have considered an exquisitely pathetic passage—what is truly and genuinely pathetic in substance—from a poet whom Mr Arnold, while exalting him above all but the first two of our poets, pronounced to have no "style at all"—

> The wretched parents all that night
> Went shouting far and wide,
> But there was neither sound nor sight,
> To serve them for a guide.

As pathetic as you like in substance: perhaps (it is no matter, but it may be mentioned) expressing a more genuine, certainly a deeper sorrow than that of Milton for King. But of the grand style nothing—intentionally nothing if you please, but nothing.

Yet let us, according to the ordinary classification, go higher again. According to the ordinary classification, I say, for that classification is not mine: and among the mysteries of "the written word which conquers time" I do not know one that is higher or lower than another. But that is not the general estimate: and I dare say some who hear me think long till we come to what is commonly called substance or matter and leave mere form—though we shall find it difficult to do that in discussing any kind of style, grand, medium, or low. But we can shift to some extent from the arrangement of words to their meaning: or to more of the meaning and less of the mere arrangement. In this plane of consideration there is certainly nothing which contributes more to the grandeur of Milton's style than what Macaulay (in a contrast with Dante, which is, perhaps, more well meant than happily expressed, and which, I believe, the late Mr Courthope more fully treated) calls his "dim intimations"—what may be perhaps more happily called the "Miltonic vague." With his usual love of the sharpest antithesis Macaulay himself has selected from Dante examples which, certainly not grotesque in the original, are made to appear somewhat grotesque in the citation and translation. There is no need to do this, and in fact it is a mistake in criticism to do it: for grotesque necessitates preciseness of a peculiar kind. You may

see this in another art by contrasting Blake who, with all his extravagance, is scarcely ever or almost never grotesque, with Cruikshank, who is never anything else. But though grotesque requires precision there is not the slightest necessity that precision should be grotesque. However, let us leave that side of the matter.

It is certain that among the few undoubted practitioners of the grand style Milton stands almost alone in this "dimness," this "vagueness" of his—it is indeed one of his most Romantic characteristics. Perhaps in some cases it may require a certain amount of reflection—at any rate a certain amount of comparison—to appreciate its extent and peculiarity, for Milton does not by any means shun description or the use of apparently descriptive epithets. From *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* through *Comus* and *Lycidas* to the *Paradises* and on to *Samson* he has abundance of it. In fact, I am not sure that I do not myself *see* Harapha and Dalilah in *Samson* more clearly than I see almost any other of Milton's personages. I use "see" in its strictest sense. His presentation of personage and place and circumstance is always intellectually sufficient; but the "mind's eye" with which they are contemplated is not the one that Hamlet meant. Indeed, in Hamlet's sense, I doubt whether there is a "visible" person in Milton. Eve once comes pretty near it, and there is a plausible biographical gloss which explains that. But I see Virgil always, at least in the *Inferno*, much more clearly than I generally see her. There are touches of the visual appeal in Sin; and I think Milton meant to make Adam as clear as Palma il Vecchio has made him to the eye; but the very fact of this characterises his style of literature in its absence of result.

It is perhaps, however, in places and scenes rather than in persons that this peculiar vagueness emerges

most strikingly, as does the opposite quality in his greatest rivals. One can see and could find one's way about the Cave of the Nymphs with the greatest ease, and if I am ever fortunate enough to reach the Earthly Paradise I shall know exactly where to look for Matilda, and almost exactly what she will look like. It may be my fault, but I can see nothing with this same distinctness in Milton. It is, I dare say, known to not a few in the present company that an ingenious lady thinks she has exactly identified the scenery of *L'Allegro* and its companion, with a Swiss not an English landscape. For myself, I should certainly say that Milton has endeavoured to give, and has very well succeeded in giving an English landscape, but that the landscape's original might be anywhere in England, at least between Trent and the Channel, Severn and the North Sea; that it is much more everywhere than anywhere in particular. It is the same with the wood of *Comus*, and the same with much of the beautiful but not strictly *focussed* scenery of *Lycidas*, where, by the way, the finest thing of all is the vast vague prospect over the Atlantic waves, in the very lines so often quoted. There is one particular picture in Dante to which I know absolutely nothing similar in Milton; I refer, of course, to similarity in kind not in particulars. And that is the great passage of the Gate of Purgatory, with the first stair of flashing white, and the second, cross-riven, of sullen blue, and the blaze of blood-red porphyry above, and the sworded angel in the ashen cloak sitting on the threshold itself, his feet on the crimson step. I do not remember any actual picture of this, but I see it as if Rossetti had painted it for my mantel-piece. The nearest thing in Milton is, I suppose, the discovery by Ithuriel. We have all seen pictures of that, but they do not "realise" Milton to me.

Now it would be, of course, not only possible but easy to give a dozen reasons—from tolerably plausible to utterly fantastic—why Milton does not attempt *pictura* as well as *poesis*. That he could not have done it is not, I think, one of these. I hardly know anything that Milton could not have done—except, perhaps, be humorous. You may, if you like, urge national tendencies: but there is the unfortunate fact before you that Spenser, as good and pure an Englishman as Milton, and in a manner his master, is almost the most pictorial of poets, with numerous others, from Chaucer long before him to men happily still alive, to keep him in company. You may say it was Puritanism: but you will find that very difficult to adjust to numberless things in the poems from the earliest to the latest, from the landscape of *L'Allegro* through the great flower-piece of *Lycidas* and the hospitality really shown to Raphael in *Paradise Lost* to that delusively offered to Christ in *Paradise Regained*. Milton has not the slightest shrinking from varied colour, even from voluptuous and luxurious detail. But he never combines it with all the definiteness of the arts of design: it is always left to the vaguer suggestiveness of one variety of literary handling. As I have hinted, we know so many illustrations to Milton that it may be hard to realise this, but even here there is a lesson waiting for those who care to learn it. There *are* many illustrations to Milton, but there are few that satisfy or even please his thorough admirers.

But is this abstinence from precise colour and form an impediment in the way of reaching the grand style? Most certainly not, though the indulgence in it is as certainly, an excellent means thereto. Perhaps there is hardly even in Dante a passage achieving this grand style better in the varied and elaborate fashion than

the one just referred to. This brings under contribution almost as many sources of the Sublime as ever flowed on Ida, from the appeals to the mental sight just particularised to others not less remarkable of the audible kind. The great words *ammassiccia* and *fiammeggiante* we may be sure such a word-artist as Milton, and such a student of Dante himself, must have envied his master. But the grand style is the Rome of styles: and all roads lead to it as to the other Eternal City.

The Miltonic vague is not only no drawback, it is almost the central strength and source of the grandeur of the poet's style. Macaulay was right there: however much he may have been out in his actual contrast with Dante. Nor is it at all necessary to have recourse to the peculiar character of Milton's subject as excusing what requires no excuses, or necessitating what, if the poet had chosen to do so, could have been avoided. It is sufficient that this vagueness was the method which he preferred, to which he was best adapted, which he exercises with most success, and which, when he deserts it, brings him sometimes nearest to failure. It is his element: he is *monachus in claustro* with any kind of restriction: and his powers are multiplied thirty fold when he gets to the infinite or at any rate the comparatively boundless. There cannot be much less definition given to the visual idea than in—

All night the dreadless angel, unpursued—

even the lines which follow adding very little. And yet if these six words do not substitute an example of the grand style I shall acknowledge my own unfitness to treat of the subject. While if I must, if only as an illuminative contrast, undertake the ungracious office of pointing out what is *not* in the grand style—I have only to go a score or two lines lower in the same context and find—

And thou in military prowess next—

which I do *not* think grand. You see Milton wanted to confer upon the Archangel Gabriel the very definite post of second in command, which Dante would have expressed as definitely. But he preferred to paraphrase and periphrase it into something less definite, and well! did not quite succeed.

How magnificently, on the other hand, this quality of vagueness has stood him in stead elsewhere it is scarcely necessary to take up time by instancing. It is difficult to conceive anything more suitable to it than the journey of Satan from Hell to Paradise: and it is at least possible that if he had relied on it more exclusively—he has actually used it with consummate effect—in the Sin- and Death-scene, he would have avoided some of the condemnation with which that scene has been visited, not merely by the adversary and the entirely miscomprehending reader, but by some weak brethren. The form of wide expatiation and Pisgah-sight which this vagueness takes, noticeable as has been said as early as *Lycidas*, if not earlier, becomes more and more so as he goes on, and supplies nearly all the finest passages except

'Tis true I am that spirit unfortunate

in *Paradise Regained.*

But it is an entire mistake to suppose that this aspiration after space or rather no space, required corresponding range of subject or scene in order to show itself. It is not only Dr Johnson who has either taken for granted or mistakenly argued that the poet of *Paradise Lost* could not be a good poet in Sonnet. As a matter of fact the Sonnets are among the chief places for the Miltonic mastery of the grand style, and by no means only where they call in some of the special devices just referred to as in

Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,

where the last three words give one of the greatest examples of the separation of epithets so much dwelt on. The grand style retains and maintains its grandeur in the most varied subjects. You see it—see it indeed in remarkable perfection—as early as the *Ode on the Nativity*: the famous stanzas on the silencing of the Oracles have this particular gift in such a measure as had been possessed by no one earlier in English except Shakespeare. You have it in the curfew passages of *Il Penseroso* with the "source" of the wide horizon specially drawn upon: and in many others of that poem and its twin. *Comus* is a most interesting blend for the more serious grand style achieved irregularly in the earlier part, and the lighter grand style achieved inevitably in the later. As for the Sonnets the better of them at least are saturated with it. Such a phrase for instance as

> The milder shades of Purgatory,

especially in its actual place, is an instance which may, at first sight, seem to lie outside the majestical range of the grand style, but will be found well within it when examined. Of *Lycidas* we have spoken, and the *Paradises* are simply full of it by common consent. But perhaps there are few more interesting, though there may be more delectable, places of study for it than *Samson Agonistes*. We have here, to some small though certainly to no great extent, what Longinus wrongly thought he saw in the author of the *Odyssey* —the spectacle of a great nature slowly and slightly senescent—not indeed turning to the childish in any way, but with its joints a little stiffened, its arteries faintly touched with sclerosis. The grandeur is almost increased: but the grace has waned a little. It is plate armour rather than mail—heavier, less elastic, less shot with varied colour. Yet it is still great and of the

greatest: it has lost nothing of the lion's ramp, though something of his spring. And if you take it with the earlier forms it exhibits a range of its own possibilities which few others have ever achieved; and which, though certainly not coextensive with that of the grand style itself—to be that would be to be coextensive within the range of possible literature—holds a great part of the field with undisputed grasp.

The peculiar importance of the grand style to blank verse is a matter too obvious to require lengthy treatment, but too intimately connected with our subject to escape some notice. When Dr Johnson laid it down that "if blank verse be not tumid and gorgeous it is crippled prose" the truth which is always to be found in Johnsonian statements, however much it be warped and wrested by prejudice, is simply this necessary connection or need of the grand style. Now, of course, the "tumid and gorgeous" is merely a mistaken imitation of the grand. It is, indeed, so far possible to agree with Johnson as to hold that the writer of a long poem will take blank verse for his vehicle at his peril, however artfully he may manage it, and however fully he may avail himself of its capacities of variation in foot and pause. The few people who do read Southey now know (as Macaulay in one of the happiest examples of his not always happy criticism prophesied that they would) that the many who do not read him are unwise. But even these few can take little pleasure in his blank verse long poems. Landor's blank verse pieces of length are hardly more readable than those of his friend on the opposite side of politics; and this is all the odder because Landor was actually a master of the grand style in short phrases and detached pieces of verse, and in prose almost without that limitation. Only Milton can keep supplies of it ready for the long

journey through the rhymeless desert. It is wonderful that they threaten drought so seldom. It would be uncritical to say that the waterskins never run dry.

But if any one should say, as is so often said with more or less of impatience, "These are all beggarly elements. Why do you not come to the great thought and the great subject which are the only begetters of the grand style?" I shall respect his sentiments, but demur to his principles. It is, indeed, impossible that the grand style should exist without great thought and great subject: for the very reason that it is of the essence of the grand style itself to make every thought that it embodies, every subject that it touches, great. But unfortunately the converse is not true: and it is perfectly possible and even not uncommon for great subjects to be treated—even for great thoughts to be expressed—without any grand style at all. To deny this would be to take a strangely pessimist view of humanity and of life *a priori*, and to neglect the facts of both *a posteriori* with a sublime carelessness, or a not quite so sublime obstinacy. Milton, it is true, chose great subjects: but so did Blackmore. Milton's thought is great: but I do not think that it is greater than Wordsworth's who possessed the grand style very rarely and who—as Mr Arnold has put it, perhaps, too sweepingly without any proviso—certainly very often had no style at all, or a style the reverse of grand. The fact is that there are few things in this world that are not great if greatly handled: and that it is only by obstinately darkening the cottage of the soul that you can quite exclude the light of the great thoughts that these great things offer you. But expressing them—but handling the subjects greatly—*that* is quite another thing. To not many has that power been given, even once or twice in their lives; to few often; to none but

the very elect of the elect with any constancy. The prophet himself saw the glory of the Lord before he could express it: and could not express it when he saw it. It was only when his lips had been touched by the coal from the altar that the power of expression came. That power of expression, in things mundane, is the grand style: and I have been trying to put before you some of the coals from the altar—things, let it be remembered, in themselves only ministerial, not part of the glory itself nor even of the offering, nor identical with the incense that they kindle, yet without which the smoke cannot fill the temple and the sacrifice cannot be consummated.

VII

DANTE AND THE GRAND STYLE

I MUST ask your permission to begin with a very few words of explanation as to the title which I have chosen for this paper. "The grand style" is an expression of uncertain origin: but in English at least it is now almost indissolubly associated with the name of the late Mr Matthew Arnold who, as is known to almost everybody, used it as one of his favourite weapons of argumentative iteration and classification. Having had some occasion to consider, not only Mr Arnold's use of it but its general application and signification in criticism, I have been more and more forced to conclude that Mr Arnold's own definition of the thing—and still more the sense in which that definition really answers to the thing itself, applies to Dante more than to either of the two other writers to whom alone Mr Arnold grudgingly granted it—namely Homer and Milton. Nay I think that, without too much narrowness, one might even say that Dante is the only writer whom it thoroughly fits, and the only one who can really have suggested it. I should myself apply the term much more widely—though by no means less jealously—than he did:—I should make it coincide with, and perhaps extend even a little beyond, the "Sublime" of Longinus so as to apply it to any "peak in Darien"—to anything which at varying heights and in different circumstances and positions distinctly stands up and out against the sky of literature. I think even (and perhaps I may say something later on this point) that Dante deserves it in other senses than that to which Mr Arnold would have

limited it. But I wish chiefly, at this moment, to consider the application to that poet of the Arnoldian dictum—vouchsafed not without a certain recalcitrance—that "the grand style arises when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject." And, further, it will be possible to limit the treatment of this very considerably even as it stands. You will hardly expect from me a demonstration that Dante's is a noble nature, poetically gifted: we can safely here, I think, "leave the Creation and pass to the Deluge" in regard to that matter. Nor will you imagine that I am shirking a difficulty if I do not argue at very great length that the subject of the *Divina Commedia* is a serious subject: though I am, I think, entitled to point out in passing that the "seriousness" of the subject, in this consummate example of the grand style, may have made the critic a little excessive in insisting on it as a necessary condition of any work that shall have the grand style. And yet further I shall, I am sure, have your leave not to chicane in the least degree about the expression "simplicity or severity." In fact we shall have but rare occasion to return to Mr Arnold at all. What I wish to do to-night is to indicate a few results of my own study of the manner in which this noble and poetically gifted nature, dealing with its serious subject simply and severely or otherwise, has developed, exemplified, provided, for us, and for all time, that palpable-elusive thing the grand style in literature. Everything that I shall say will be no doubt familiar to somebody, much to many, something to everybody here present: but it is all at any rate based on a continuous reading of the whole poem for this special purpose, and a subsequent comparison of the passages noticed specially as bearing on the matter in that read-

ing. I cannot boast the genius of the gentleman who recently revealed to the public how he or somebody else, being called upon to write about Chateaubriand and never having read a line of him, simply decanted or decocted Sainte-Beuve on the subject and was complimented by "a well-known authority on French literature" (I wonder who *he* was!) on his extraordinary mastery of criticism. When I have to write about an author I generally read him first; and I seldom find that, with any author of any greatness, even repeated readings fail to give some result fresh to the reader if not to other people.

For the central quality of the grandeur of Dante's style I do not find any word in the above definition which to my mind exactly and positively fits. For "nobility" is too general; "simplicity" does not fit him as it fits Homer; and "severity" seldom (to my fancy) fits him as it not seldom does Milton. "Dignity" has a treacherous comic *aura* about it: and "grandeur" would be mere tautology. What Spenser doubtless meant by Magnificence—that is to say a combination of the Aristotelian μεγαλοπρέπεια and the Aristotelian μεγαλοψυχία transposed to the key of literature—comes near. But Aristotle himself, in the dawn of criticism, empowered everybody to use the inestimable method of defining by negatives: and therefore there need be no shame in using it, while we take reinforcement from some positive words which, if not adequate individually, help to make out something not quite inadequate. However often I read Dante, I never can resist a fresh and increasing astonishment at the "quietness and confidence" in which as the Biblical phrase has it, is the strength of his style. Part of this, of course, comes from the very nature of the Italian hendecasyllable, and of his special arrangement of it in *terza rima* with,

as one of his best followers in English, the late Canon Dixon, has said, "the playing of the structure round the stanza arrested somewhat at the end." That hurry (which though not quite fatal to all sublimity is always fatal to this particular kind) cannot touch it. The fall of the trochaic cadence is not a "dying fall" by any means; there is nothing languishing in it; it is as much alive as fire, and yet there is not the slightest agitation about it. Nobody ever, for a constancy, has the much spoken-of gift of "inevitableness," in style at least, as Dante has. In passages of course—especially in passages of the best known part of his work—the Inevitable becomes the Inexorable: but this is by no means always so. What the touch of the wand of his style always does is to make the expression—whether for beauty, awe, or what not—*final*. "There is no more to seyn," to use a favourite catchword with our first and not far from our greatest English Dantist, Chaucer. There is nothing to add with any possibility of improvement: and seldom anything to add with any real necessity of explanation. Dante's phrase is of course sometimes obscure, but it is then rarely of his very greatest; if it is, the removal of the obscurity is only a work of supererogation; the general impression to any reasonably intelligent person is sufficient and right.

Take, for instance, one of his most famous—one even of his most hackneyed phrases—*dove il sol tace*, "where the sun is silent." You may, as a commentator, quite properly explain that this is a transference of imagery from one sense to another and that parallels occur to it in the same author and in others. And there may be persons to whom such a proceeding is helpful, persons to whom even it is necessary—though for my part I would rather not talk of it to *them*. But to anybody who is old enough—I had almost said—who ever

will be old enough to understand Dante at all, this is entirely superfluous: and any really competent student will see at once that the absence of expansion in the original, and the superfluity of the comment, *make* the grandeur. The sun which speaks in the silence of noonday; which suggests its speech by moon and stars in the silence of midnight; is silent simply and *sans phrase* in Hell. There could not be a more triumphant illustration of Mr Arnold's definition of the grand style: not I think a more complete one of a definition that should be more complete than Mr Arnold's.

But such "a jewel *four* words long" cannot be expected very often even in the greatest writers. Less concise but very interesting examples of the grand style, and that which is not the grand style, will be found in the famous interchange of self-introductions between Virgil and Dante in the second Canto, and in Dante's description of his change of purpose in the Third. There is hardly a line of the first passage (which extends in its very best part to at least twenty) that does not contain these final phrases, reduced to the very lowest terms in compass and apparatus, charged to the very highest with meaning, yet never over-reduced or overcharged. In the second, though it is a fine passage and true to nature, the expression does not equally *collect* itself: it wanders and rests itself with the repetition of the mood it gives, and so does not quite give that mood in transcendence. The transcendence recurs in another famous passage on the wretches who "made refusal" the "caitiff choir." Even these everlastingly quoted words do not seem to me quite so "grand" in the combination of perfection of expression with pregnancy of meaning as the five simple words that come later *que mai non fur vivi*—they who had never dared to live, and therefore could never hope to die.

But I had rather, in so brief a survey, avoid the universally known and quoted things—Francesca and Ugolino and Ulysses. There is a less commonly cited passage (but one which struck Mr Pater long ago, and, as has been made known since I wrote this paper, another person) in the description (vii. 121) of the victims of that mysterious sin of Accidia which is so insufficiently translated by "Sloth" and for which some whom the world certainly would not regard as slothful might have trouble in Purgatory if not, let us hope, elsewhere. This passage suffers, to an English eye, from the fact that it contains the—in our language now unpardonable but in others and in our own of old hardly even venial—fault of identical rhymes: but that is not essential:

> Tristi fummo
> Nell' aer dolce che dal sol s' allegra,
> Portando dentro accidioso fummo:
> Or ci attristiam nella belletta negra.

That seems to me a perfect minor example—if I may say so—of the grand style in its formulation of the outward conditions in the present and the fatal inward conditions precedent in the past. And I do not think the next two lines (which some would call conceit) inferior

> Quest' inno si gorgoglian nella strozza
> Che dir nol posson con parola integra—

even clear resolute articulation being denied them for their indolence past and present. But here comes in that dispute at which I have hinted, as to the compatibility of conceit and the grand style, between those who hold conceit to be an accursed thing and those who hold as I do that the grand style can transmute conceit and everything else, and that Dante does here and elsewhere so transmute it. So too all may not see grandeur in the few words on Caiaphas

> disteso in croce
> Tanto vilmente nel eterno esilio

with their silent indignant comparison and contrast in every way with the glorious cross of Christ. But one of the main, if not even one of the constant, marks of the grand style seems to me to be this suggestion of things that are *not* said—this evidence of things not seen. It would take too long, though it is rather tempting, to compare the great Fame passage in Canto xxiv with that in *Lycidas* which it undoubtedly suggested: for here we should have to settle that matter of Dante's familiar (and as some think even shockingly familiar) imagery which though closely connected with our subject, would overweight the present treatment of it. And I must also only indicate a comparison between the remarkable last line of xxviii

Così s' osserva in me lo contrapasso

with Shakespeare's

The wheel is come full circle: I am here.

But this, like everything that I am quoting here, will illustrate the way in which Dante attains grandeur by an infinitely varied use of the old figure *meiosis*—the saying continually *less* than he means, but in such a fashion as brings the full meaning home with double force to the reader. This is the true literary interpretation and bearing of the still older saying that the half is greater than the whole: and it will be found constantly applicable to this grand style of ours, and especially to our poet in his exemplifications thereof. In this sense the "sincerity or severity" cannot be denied though, as some of my hearers will know very well, there are occasions where Dante allows himself, and seems rather to rejoice in, a copious complication and to speak familiarly "roundaboutation" of phrase. I have sometimes been tempted to think this an almost deliberate set-off to the commoner terseness: but perhaps this is fanciful.

No place is fuller of our evidence than the opening of the *Purgatorio*: indeed the first two Cantos are almost compact of it. The immense sense of *relief* which the poet has managed to communicate to his readers expresses itself in no relaxation of style: but only in a greater glow and brightness. Some people no doubt would think it mere trifling if one pointed out at length the extraordinary skill with which the varying *o*-sounds of the first half of "Dolce color d' oriental zaffiro" are exchanged for the dominant *a*'s of the last with the *e* to bridge them and the final *o* to serve as a coda of return. But I am not ashamed to confess absolute belief in these "trifling" things: and in their connection with the grandeur as well as with the sweetness of style. And for the combined fascination of the grand and the sweet I do not know where to look for anything to surpass the passage of the appearance of the boat from the line

Per li grossi vapor Marte rosseggia

onwards. It is perhaps not unworthy to note that similes, despite the pride of place justly assigned to them in all poetry from Homer downwards, are apt to be rather dangerous implements for the grand style, owing to their tendency to encourage frittering and filigree rather than massive effects. But nobody gets over this danger better than Dante: precisely because of his unfailing hold on the grand. You may find an instance of it in the description, just below, of the angel's wings

l' eterne penne,
Che non si mutan come mortal pelo.

Dante, let it be observed, never throws away the word "eternal" or any other of the greater gold coins of speech: whereas our modern "stylists" are apt to play chuck-farthing, or try to play it with them, till they are as common as the farthing itself. But he is also, as we

have seen, rather sparing of explanations: he likes to leave his grandeurs to make their own effect. Yet he achieves one here by the explanation itself and why? Because at first sight the epithet may seem *otiose*. Everything about the angel is immortal: why specially his wings? And then the suggestion drops—in the old simple inevitable manner—that that change and refreshing of plumage which is so noteworthy and so beautiful in the mortal bird is unnecessary and would be a blemish in the bird of God—that there is no need for *him* to mew his mighty and eternal youth. There is an almost more striking instance of this after a different fashion in iii. 122 where Manfred, acknowledging the heinousness of his sins, says:

> Ma la bontà infinita ha sì gran braccia,
> Che prende ciò che si rivolge a lei.

At the very first sight and hearing a not quite foolish person may regard the second line as an anti-climax. But *rivolge* has here the full virtue of grandeur. The Arms are so wide that they will even receive what *returns*—that is to say, what has at first scorned them and turned *from* them. This canto in fact is very full of great places and I can only wonder at any Dantist being in the least surprised at such a one as *del cammin la mente*, "the riddle of the painful road." The Sordello passage and the Valley of the Kings and others I drop on the same principle as before; as well as (though not without regret) the incomparable opening of Canto Eight, *Era già l' ora*, which speaks with equal appeal to the merest novice and to the past master in critical appreciation. I shall only observe of this latter that nothing could better exemplify the power of the Grand Style itself on those sentimental commonplaces which are the most treacherous of material. For it is an old saying and a true, that nothing shows a poet's power

more than his dealing with these: and to particularise this generality nothing shows Dante's power over the grand style more than the *un*commonness of his commonplace. The very next canto presents a pendant exemplification of this in the simile of the swallow at morning.

But nothing in the whole poem can surpass, for adequate and accurate magnificence of expression, the description of the Steps of Purgatory. Contrasted verbalisations of the three great colours, red, white and blue, are innumerable in poetry: an invalid with his or her mind not too much affected might make an innocent diversion of collecting them. But surely there is none so intense as this, with its symbolism open and yet unenforced, its picture-effect clear to the mind's eye like the greatest sight of nature or art to the bodily, and accompanied by the most astonishing word-music. Hardly anything shows the prowess of Italian, in the less soft moods of its music, so well as the *petrina ruvida ed arsiccia* and as the single verb *ammassiccia* for the *porfiro fiammeggiante* of the third step. Perhaps indeed the thing is *the* example of the grand style, of the more elaborate and sterner kind. And as I have just noted the effect in the palette of the grand style of these mighty words, let me quote another where Dante avails himself as marvellously of another single vocable as Shakespeare does of "multitudinous" and "incarnadine" in a famous triumph of his. I speak as absolutely no Italian scholar at all, in fact I apologise very heartily[1] for mangling my citations with what has always been the most English of mouths; but I suppose that no reader of the language who has been accustomed to read any language minutely, while he may notice the absence of compound words in Italian can have

[1] To hearers of course: readers fortunately escape it (1923).

failed to notice the curious developments and amplifications of single words which it boasts. One of these Dante has made a thing to marvel at just below the place to which we had got where he says of the graven history of the act that freed Trajan from Hell:

che diretro a Micol mi bianchieggiava.

This single word for the gleaming white and gold background is great enough. But remember to *what* and whom it was a background—to that not too well-treated wife of David who has been pourtrayed as

Si come donna dispettosa e trista

and observe the contrast provided. And this cunning manipulation of the dictionary is shown again a little lower in the word *disviticchia*, "peers through the vines," used of Dante trying to distinguish individuals in the tangled crowd of those who stoop under the burden of Pride.

If I am not teasing you too much with these detailed references, I should like to note (Canto xiii) at the beginning of the description of the pass of livid rock that admits to the Circle of Envy, the singularly and characteristically pregnant use of *livido* itself, uncommented, undwelt upon, and all the more forcible. So again to make great strides (not for dearth of matter but for want of time) those words of Mark the Lombard in the angry smoke where the belief (noblest surely of all will-worships!) in the stars, is corrected by the words:

A maggior forza ed a miglior natura
Liberi soggiacete

where the amplification and precision at once given by the three adjectives and the verb to the substantives is a very opal of style. And the wonderful description of the Siren in the dream of Canto xix; and passage after passage in the introductory scene with Statius;

and the curious illustration of that fancy for *litotes* "lessening" (which we have noticed and which sometimes, to readers accustomed to more superlative and gesticulatory styles, seems an anticlimax or a bareness) in the poet's modest boast that when Diocletian persecuted the Christians they came to seem so holy to him that their cries were *not without his tears*. As for the last six or seven cantos of this *cantica* the difficulty is what example *not* to quote. I doubt whether in any place of any poet there can be found such an astonishing concentration and combination of poetical thought with expression of the highest order, as that which fills the whole space between the passage through the Fire and the draught from the waters of Eunoe. There must be about a thousand lines in all: and it is of the rarest to find a single passage that descends even to medium excellence in point of phrase. The very opening of the Twenty-seventh Canto has one of those "grand style conceits" as I have called them, which are so interesting, in the amplification of "sanguine sunrise" by the notion of the Sun making his rays quiver where his Maker shed his blood. And the baptism of fire itself; and the elaborate and beautiful comparison of the three pilgrims' sleep on the mountain-side and its unforced even unmentioned contrast of the cool dark rest with the burning glow of the fiery cincture and everything from this set of illustrations continues it. The Leah-Rachel dream; the resignation of his guideship by Virgil; each of these is enshrined in this same crystal rather than amber coating of style, which does not merely give access to every shred and speck of meaning, does not merely magnify it and make it more easily perceptible, but adds lustre and iridescence without detracting from clearness and veracity.

But it would be almost sufficient to take the Cantos

of the Earthly Paradise alone for our special purposes of illustration, at least on the milder side. The subject has been—and naturally enough—a favourite one with poets. To tell the honest truth, I fear it appeals to most of us a good deal more closely than the Heavenly. Let us at any rate say, if this seems shocking, that we are much better furnished with ideas and images wherewith to depict and adorn it. But for this very reason there are certain dangers attending its description—dangers of a glorified Land of Cocaigne or (according to time and idiosyncrasy) a glorified International Exhibition. That Dante entirely avoids both is due, not merely to his careful selection of subjects but (and still more) to those peculiarities of his expression which we are here discussing. Any child must of course notice the opening contrast of the forest—the *divina foresta spessa e viva* with the evil wood where the whole Commedia begins. But the poet justifies his mastery by things much less obvious than this. The passage of breeze and foliage and birds which follows is great enough: but not, I think, quite equal to that on Lethe—the brown stream beneath the sunproof and moonproof trees which "hides nothing" in itself and yet when drunk hides everything but good from the memory. Whether either is equal or superior to the picture of Matilda which follows must be I suppose very much a matter of individual taste.

It is possible that some one may here say—may have felt already inclined to say—"Yes; these things are beautiful and we know them very well: but there are plenty of beautiful things in other poets: and even as Dante's they have no special connection with the grand style." Well; that is the question. My point is that if you will compare them with other beautiful passages of other poets you will find certain pecu-

liarities, some of which I have endeavoured to point out, differentiating them from these: and for what causes the differentiation I can find no better phrase than that which forms our title. I think it is Southey who says that a friend of his used to say of a thing as his highest term of encomium that it was "necessary and voluptuous and right." It is an excellent combination: and I do not know any which better expresses the grand style itself. There are some poets of the greater kind —I suppose most people would take Ariosto as a representative of them though I am not sure that I do— who are "voluptuous" beyond dispute and in a manner "right" but not exactly "necessary." There are others, of whom Wordsworth most naturally suggests himself, who are often right enough and sometimes quite necessary, but too seldom voluptuous. In hardly any poet do the three qualities meet so constantly and unite so firmly as in Dante: and in no part of Dante is the trinity more constantly obvious than here. This union poetises the long and somewhat unpromising Pageant of the Grifon with all its historico-politico-controversial meanings. This union—as it alone could be— is worthy to give in words the apparition of Beatrice and the disparition of Virgil. It enforces the marvellous "convincing of sin" which the poet receives from his lady: and it is equal to the re-Baptism in Lethe. In particular what I have called the apparition of Beatrice is one of the most miraculous word-miracles known to me. A painter could not do it at all: a stage spectacle-maker, availing himself of all devices and tricks of stage-carpentry and stage-chemistry could only make a base mechanic travesty of it. It is pure magic: the white magic of style and of grand style.

I have sometimes ventured to think that the comparative neglect of the *Paradiso*, as well as that baffle-

ment which so many honest though not neglectful students have confessed, and which I myself felt till a very recent period, is due not merely to the greater abstruseness of much of the subject-matter, but to the fact that this abstruseness comes in the way of the appreciation of the special mastery of style here displayed. When "the pikes are past" as the old Elizabethan phrase has it—when the unfamiliarity and the frequent scholasticism of matter are left on one side, the extraordinary quality of this can hardly be missed. The terror and the pity, the variety and the stimulus of the *Inferno* could—though they do not—dispense with style. The intense personal interest of the *Purgatory*—the most engrossing and intimately insisting of the three and that which comes most home to the soul—might almost dispense with it. But the *Paradise* would be almost the faulty faultlessness, the arid perfection which it is charged with being, if it were not for the consummate expression which everywhere clothes it with beauties like its own glories of colour and light and harmony. I have never been able to think that the famous line which Mr Arnold singled out, and which many if not most English-writing critics have obediently followed him in selecting,

In la sua volontade è nostra pace

is really the greatest example of this, magnificent as it is. The greatness of *meaning* is rather tyrannous: it imposes by itself. And the exquisite Leonine assonance (if I may be pardoned the pedantry) of *volontade* and *pace* is too much a matter of course: it is the dictionary, not Dante, that does it for us. Elsewhere there is no possibility of such (I fully admit the impeachment) irreligious cavilling. Everything has been done with Dante: and therefore, though I do not know, I suppose that some on may have collected

separately what we may call "the Passages of the Eyes"—the prodigious and almost unbelievable variations of the one idea of the virtue and beauty of the glance of Beatrice which Dante has scattered over the poem—never repeating himself, never condescending to a mere conceit, and yet never failing, any more than the Eyes themselves, to satisfy the almost incredulous expectation of the astonished observer. And this may bring me afresh to a fresh point glanced at already —the point of Dante and the Grand Style in reference to *Conceit*—to far-fetched and eccentric expression. We know that according to some ideas of the Grand Style—to those of the ancients almost always, except in the case of Longinus, and in his case sometimes—these two things are irreconcilable. Where Conceit comes in, the Grand Style, say they, goes out: and Frigidity takes its place. Some of us who most honour the ancients are not of that opinion: I certainly am not. The Grand Style is sovereign here as elsewhere: it can give *grandezza* to any expression to which it gives its hand to kiss and its garment to touch. Shakespeare does this of course as well as Dante: much lesser men than Shakespeare and Dante such as Donne, can do it sometimes. But these latter cannot always and Shakespeare though he always can, does not always care to do it. I will not say that Dante never fails, but he very seldom does: and a list of his conceits which in other hands might have merely been the King's jesters, and in his are Paladins and Peers, would not be a difficult thing to draw up and would be a curious thing to study. If you will permit me I will specify one or two.

In the first place I am not sure that the extreme scholasticism which has frequently been charged against the *Paradiso*, and which often gives the appear-

ance of Conceit, has not, in Dante's hands, though it may be admitted that there are very few hands in which it could have had the effect—proved a positive assistance by communicating that precision of expression which, as we have seen, has so much to do with grandeur of style. The very first three lines exhibit this quality in almost startling manner. They are from one point of view a truism, a mere commonplace, something to which you say "Agreed. Agreed."

La gloria di Colùi che tutto muove
Per l' universo penetra, e risplende
In una parte più, e meno altrove.

And yet this truism, this commonplace, gives perhaps as nothing else could give—pretty certainly as nothing else could give better—the keynote of the whole *cantica*, the differing manifestations of the Glory of God. How different and yet how similar is the phrase at l. 95 of the same canto respecting the

sorrise parolette brevi

"The little words rather smiled than spoken" with which Beatrice puts an end to his doubt! Less austere than the first, and less reticent and sedate than the second, is the magnificent opening of Canto v where we have the grand style in full pomp of phrase, and prodigality of vowel music, and ambient atmosphere of sound—a splendour in short almost as dazzling as the accompanying glances of the Eyes themselves, before which the mortal lover and sinner quails:

S' io ti fiammeggio nel caldo d' amore
Di là dal modo che in terra si vede,
Si che deg' occhi tuoi vinco il valore,
Non ti maravigliar.

Only the grandest of grand styles could suit that bold and somewhat perilous passage of Folco's where he says that those who, though pardoned, have sinned for love, repent not but smile—not for their fault, of

which Lethe has taken away the very memory, but for the blissful order of the world which they too blindly abused. And only the same could befit the companion passage where the glory of Rahab is likened to that of sunlight in pure water. Very exemplary too is the single line (xiv. 27)

Lo refrigerio dell' eterna ploia

where, as often happens in the two later Cantiche, the sting of the beauty lies in the suggestion—not dwelt on, not even indicated in words, but *there*—of the contrast of the *other* eternal rains—not refreshing but torturing—of fire and of water in Hell. Perhaps we may lay stress again on this feature of grandeur of style—allusiveness that is not laboured, that permits brevity, and at the same time extends meaning. Canto xiv contains a strikingly different but strikingly complementary passage, the great description of the Cross in the Heaven of Mars with the wonderful device of the word *Cristo* twice rhyming to itself only, and as it were bracing two tercets into a single quintet tipped trident-fashion with the sacred sound. Almost as many know the last line of the fifteenth (though it has been less quoted) as those who know Mr Arnold's favourite: and the acknowledgment of the perfection of

E venni del martirio in questa pace

can, I think, be even better justified, without any qualification. Less splendid, but when examined not less consummate perhaps, is a phrase early in the sixteenth

Dove appetito non si torce

with once more, as in all these great short phrases, its unexpressed suggestion that appetite is not bad, that it is good, if only care be taken to keep it "untwisted" and directed to the proper objects. In xviii. 21 by

good luck one of Dante's most delectable lines falls naturally into no bad English equivalent:

Not only in my glance is Paradise.

The whole of the imagery of the Eagle in this context deserves to be studied by those who care to follow out what I have said of the marriage of the Grand Style with Conceit: and its speech in the next two Cantos is nearly as full of places for us despite the abstract character of much of the substance.

Chè non pur nei miei occhi è Paradiso.

Perhaps the three or four words

E quella non ridea

at the beginning of the Twenty-first are Dante's tersest and most concentrated triumph[1]: and I hardly know another poet, except Shakespeare, who would have been able to refrain from hurting their effect by interposing something about his own feelings between the announcement of this eclipse, and Beatrice's explanation of its reason. And then comes the return of the smile in the Twenty-third—a canto so full of beauties of this kind that it would serve as a text by itself—with its shower of similes—the most abundant anywhere, as the poet strives to master his new privileges. Even the "Examination Cantos" as we may call them—in a phrase which I can assure any part of my audience who have doubts on the matter is quite as disagreeable in association to Professors as it can possibly be to others—do not spare the spell. Who but Dante would have thought of the phrase "La grazia qui donnea con la tua mente" "the grace which rules in thy mind as lady" with its double application? For there is a Grand Style in compliment, and in gallantry,

[1] They rank near to if not level with the two "jewels *four* words long" of "The rest is silence" and *ἐγὼ δὲ μόνα κατεύδω*, four well-known words giving the most absolutely uncommon effect, which seem to me the triumph of poetry in Shakespeare and Sappho.

and in everything just as we have seen it in Conceit. I must pass rapidly over the beautiful simile of the doves in Twenty-five; and the marvellous close of this same when he has lost sight of his Mistress; and passage after passage in the Third examination by St John; and the strange audacious simplicity of the image when Adam is introduced; to a passage famous but extraordinarily interesting—the great denunciation of his successors by St Peter. It is almost needless to say that hardly any English reader can avoid thinking of that other passage in *Lycidas* which it suggested. Dante will scarcely be acquitted by any but the blindest worshippers of party-spirit: but how petty and parochial is Milton's expression of it in comparison with his! and how poor the imagery and machinery of the later poet in comparison with the blushing of the whole sphere of Heaven in sympathy with the Apostle's indignation! Nor can I agree with an excellent critic that one of the phrases for this is in any way "cumbrous"—a fault which would at once unfit it for being called "grand." When Dante says that St Peter's torch

> Tal nella sembianza sua divenne
> Qual diverebbe Giove s' egli e Marte
> Fossero augelli e cambiassersi penne,

it must be remembered that the first thing that has struck him in the sphere of the Fixed Stars, where all this happens, was the motion of the planets beneath. He has Jupiter and Mars, in their natural colours, revolving beneath and before him as he speaks: and the exchange of these colours is a natural and telling suggestion, recalling at the same time the grandeur and vastness of the whole scene and situation. As I have tried to point out, this suggestiveness, this inclusion as it were of any amount of comment *with* the text but without any cumbrous innuendo, is one of the *differentiae* of the grand style in general and of

Dante's in particular. I know however that these minute illustrations are wearisome to many: and that the critic is wiser who consults his hearers' or readers' ease (happening also to consult his own at the same time) by indulgence in generalities: and I shall only trouble you with one or two more. One of these must be the final Passage of the Smile in Canto xxx with its wonderful fancy of the mind severed from itself by memory

La mente mia da sè medesma scema

the memory still able to record, but the plastic and representative faculties vanquished by perfection from reproducing. And the River of Light (where, as an exception, he brings the sense of smell *sub specie eternitatis* in spite of Aristotelian prudery) nearly fifty lines of the most gorgeous imagery that any poet ever poured forth, saved everywhere from the least touch of tawdriness: and the Picture of the Rose itself; these remain uncommented, uncommentable. Only the grandest style, here and in the final Canto, could keep matter of such intensity and such altitude from being either unintelligible, or jejune, or frigid in expression: yet it is so kept. And I am not aware of any more remarkable example of the transforming powers of such a style than the lines in reference to Beatrice

E che soffristi per la mia salute
In inferno lasciar le tue vestige.

Only the strictest verity of meaning, in reference to the summoning of Virgil to be his guide, could avoid here the suspicion of blasphemy: and only the strictest accuracy as well as beauty of expression could save it from the objection of bad taste. It will incur neither save from those of whose disapproval Dante would have been disdainfully glad in his more unregenerate condition, and calmly neglectful after Lethe and Eunoe had completed the purgation of the Seven Letters.

And now I have done with these citations in detail and very nearly with all that I have to say on the subject; but a little summing up is a good fashion and to be followed whenever possible. I have already quoted Chaucer—the number and character of whose own Dante-citations and allusions is the more surprising the more one looks into them—and I shall venture to quote him once more in his most remarkable reference (that of the *Monk's Tale*) to

> the great poet of Itaille
> That highte Dante, for he can it devise
> From point to point, not o word wol he faile.

It is possible of course to take this peculiar eulogy "not one word will he fail" as merely concerning the matter—as referring to Dante's well-known minuteness and exactness of detail. I do not think, however, that it is absolutely preposterous, especially when we remember what a master of style Chaucer himself was, how his own countrymen and contemporaries recognised the "gold dewdrops of speech" which they were unluckily unable to imitate—to extend or concentrate the eulogy upon those characteristics of Dante's style to which I have been, however inadequately, endeavouring to call your attention. That this style is nobly poetic we shall all agree; that it has at last very often a singular simplicity and not seldom something that may be called severity as well will not be commonly denied; perhaps my own belief that Mr Arnold had these special notes of the special style principally and almost too principally before him, when he defined the grand style in general, may seem to some not quite gratuitous or preposterous. But I think this phrase of Chaucer's about "not failing in one word" is a happier as well as briefer description of Dante's style than Mr Arnold's would be if it were avowedly directed to Dante, and (what is more) that it is a happier definition of the

Grand Style in general than Mr Arnold's own. Not to fail in one word means to be perfectly *adequate*—to hit the mark, and nothing else but the mark, and the mark itself full and home. Where there is too large excursion, too great abundance, or too great extravagance of diction or imagery, the Grand Style escapes before the writer has finished; where there is too great economy and poverty of either—even where there is not an atmosphere and *aura* of suggestion as well as positive statement—the writer has fallen short of the Grand Style and finished before he has attained it. It will itself admit, as we have seen, of extreme complexity —nay of positive conceit as I have endeavoured to argue; it will admit likewise (as is less likely to be argued against) of the extremest conciseness—of a terseness which is in fact the reduction of speech to its simplest terms. But always the two functions of speech itself—the accomplished conveyance of the meaning as such, and the conveyance of it beautifully —must be achieved to the uttermost; in both these functions the old requirement of the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, must be paid to the uttermost farthing. I could enter into due refinements on this if I thought it advisable or tolerable; I could point out that that "myriadsidedness" of great expression which the best critics have noticed—that fact that it means this to me and that to thee—is so far from being an evasion or falsification of this law, that it is an exact fulfilment thereof inasmuch as the capacity of the individual for receiving depth of meaning and beauty of expression varies. But this would be for the moment at any rate superfluous. Let me end once more with our first great poet of England that this great poet of Italy "will not fail one word" in any trial that you may set him of the Grand Style in poetry.

VIII

THE COOKERY OF THE GROUSE

I HAVE always regretted that I did not preserve a French book on game and its cookery which passed through my hands some[1] years ago. The author frankly admitted that grouse do not live in France, though black-game of course are found there. But he wished to be complete, and moreover, as he very justly observed, some of his French readers might have one or more brace of grouse sent them by English friends, and then what were they to do? So he gave with great pride what he was pleased to call a receipt for "Grouse à la Dundy." Dundy, I remember, he defined as being not only the gamiest, *la plus giboyeuse*, city of Scotland, but also renowned for every variety of refinement of taste and luxury—superior in short to Peebles itself. And the way that they cooked grouse in Dundy was —but that is exactly what I have forgotten. To the best of my memory it was like most French fashions of cooking game—a sufficiently ingenious method of making the best of any natural flavour that the bird might have, and imbuing it with a good many others, not at all disagreeable, but superadded rather than evolved or assisted, a method useful enough for old birds or indifferent birds, but improper for others.

This process could nowhere be more a counsel of imperfection than in the case of grouse; which, I venture to think, has of all game birds the most distinct and the least surpassable flavour. There are those, of course, who will put in claims for others, and this is not the place to fight the matter out. I shall only say

[1] Thirty or forty now (1923).

that while nearly all game birds are good, and some eminently good, grouse seems to me to be the best, to possess the fullest and at the same time the least violent flavour—to have the best consistency of flesh and to present the greatest variety of attractions in different parts. It has become almost an affectation to speak of the excellence of his back; let us rather say that he is all good—back and breast, legs and wings.

Black-game, capercailzie, and ptarmigan are but varieties of grouse, and almost everything that applies to the red grouse applies to them. Indeed, the excellent Baron Brisse characteristically includes both black-game and capercailzie in saying that there are two kinds of *coq de bruyère*, the one about the size of a peacock, the other about the size of a pheasant. All three birds, it is scarcely necessary to say, have, owing to their habitat and food, a much stronger flavour than the red grouse; and it depends very much on the predominance or moderation of this flavour whether they are intolerable, tolerable, or excellent. Moreover, in the case of two of them at least, English estimation of them is wont to be injuriously affected by the importation of vast numbers of ptarmigan and capercailzie from the North of Europe, without the slightest regard to their fitness for food. I have seen it stated, indeed, that most of the Norwegian capercailzie which are sold in English shops are poached by illegal and unsportsmanlike processes, at the very time when they are most out of season. Ptarmigan soup, however, is quite excellent, and I am not sure that even grouse at its best can give points to a roast grey hen in good condition. But partly because of the strong nature of their food—whereof pine and juniper shoots and seeds are the chief parts—and partly because they are stronger flying birds, and therefore tougher than the

red grouse, black-game require even more keeping than that "estimable volatile." The whole tribe, indeed, will bear this process as no other birds will. It was the custom of a hospitable friend of mine in Scotland, who was equally good with rod and gun, to keep a supply of grouse hanging till he could accompany them with salmon caught in a river which was by no means a very early opening one, and I never found birds taste better. The less regarded members of the grouse tribe will, as I have said, bear much longer keeping. Indeed, the best if not the only really good capercailzie that I ever tasted had been subjected to the indignity of being forgotten. He was imported into the Channel Islands by an enterprising game-dealer; I bought him, and as the house in which I was living had no good larder, I asked the man to keep him on his own premises till he and we were ready. We promptly forgot all about him, and it was several weeks before the shamefaced dealer, who was equally oblivious, said one day, "I'm afraid, sir, that capercailzie...!" Nevertheless we had him sent home. It was necessary to amputate and discard a considerable part of him, but the rest was altogether admirable.

With all these birds, but especially with ptarmigan, dryness is the great thing to be feared when roasting them; and this must be guarded against by liberal basting, by jackets of bacon, and in other well-known ways, especially, perhaps, by the German method of marinading and larding given below. Except in soup, old birds of all the three kinds are very nearly hopeless, and should not be attempted. And though in the abstract most, if not all, of the methods of what may be called applied grouse-cookery are applicable to them, it is well to remember that the extremely strong flavour above referred to marries itself but awkwardly to

miscellaneous additions, and is almost impossible simply to disguise with them. Indeed, it is noteworthy that even French cookery books do not as a rule meddle much with the *coq de bruyère*, but prefer him plain. Nor does any of the tribe make a very good devil. "Tickler," indeed, in the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, avoucheth that even eagle's thigh is good devilled; but the context does not inspire complete confidence in the good faith of the sage of Southside at that moment. On the whole, it may be laid down that black-game and capercailzie (the latter when young and in very good condition) are best roasted, ptarmigan stewed or converted into soup. But I must own that I have eaten roast ptarmigan which left the room (at least the bones did) without a stain on their character—which were "white birds" as much metaphorically as literally.

With these preliminary remarks and cautions as to the outlying varieties we may turn to the cooking of grouse proper. For very obvious reasons the antiquarian part of the matter needs but little attention. Until railway-and-steamboat-time grouse were anything but common in London and exceedingly uncommon in Paris, and the *chef* of literary tendencies was not likely to trouble himself much about them. Their rarity in the former place is exemplified in the well-known though doubtless apocryphal legend of the Highland chieftain who ordered "grouse and salmon" for his domestics at a London hotel. And the books said very little about them. For instance, a lady had the great kindness to examine for me a country-house collection of cookery books, English, Scotch, French, and American, extending to some score of volumes, and all printed between 1790 and 1830. They yielded practically nothing but the direction "Roast moor-game

half an hour: serve with fried bread crumbs, bread sauce, and sliced raw onions in a little water in the same boat," and the still more general advice to "dress them like partridges and send them up with currant jelly and fried bread crumbs." It is somewhat interesting to notice that the onion sauce (or rather salad) here suggested is neither more nor less than a degraded and barbarous survival of the onion *purée* which, as will be seen in the following chapter on the Partridge, Gervase Markham had prescribed for that bird some two centuries earlier. As for the currant jelly I think it hardly survives now, but for people who like currant jelly with flesh or fowl it is not bad with grouse, while as usual cranberry or rowan-berry jelly is better still. German and American cooks also sometimes recommend *plum*-sauce. But in connection with the general direction to "cook them like partridges" I am tempted to add two receipts for dressing that bird which I did not know at the time of writing on it, but which seem admirably adapted to grouse also, and which come from the collection referred to above. They appear in *La Cuisine de Santé*, an elaborate work in three volumes written by M. Jourdain Le Cointe, and revised in the year 1790 by a medical practitioner of Montpellier. This latter man of art, by the way, seems during that stirring time to have been as unpolitically engaged as his brother *savant* who was indifferent to the Revolution because he had an unprecedented number of irregular verbs all nicely conjugated and written out in his desk.

The first of these receipts is called *à la Sultane*, and is described as one of the favourite dishes of Venetian cookery; the other, also asserted to be Italian in origin, is *à la cendre*.

For birds *à la Sultane* you take four, and sacrifice

the least promising of the quartette to make a *farce* for the other three, with the usual accompaniment of mushrooms, anchovies, etc. You then, having stuffed the others, lard them not merely with bacon but with anchovies and truffles, and roast them before a not too fierce fire, basting them till they are two-thirds done with good *consommé*. "Il unit l'agrément et la salubrité," says of his dish M. Jourdain Le Cointe or the Montpellier doctor, evidently leaning back in his chair with a sense of satisfaction after writing the words. It would be interesting to try this receipt with grouse, and I think it would answer, though I should be disposed to omit the anchovies. The other manner, *à la cendre*, contains a slight puzzle to me. It is directed that the birds, jacketed in bacon and stuffed with the usual *farce* made of one of their number, shall each be wrapped with extreme care, so that no part is uncovered, in a large sheet of white paper strewed with sliced truffles. Each packet being carefully tied up with packthread is buried in hot ashes, turning it if necessary till cooked. Our authority says that this way of cooking is very popular in Italy, but to his thinking dries the birds too much and deprives them of their *qualité restaurante*. That, I should say, would depend on the stuffing and jacketing. But what sort of paper is it that will stand the heat of ashes hot enough to cook a partridge through? Burnt-paper ash is not the nicest of condiments, and, moreover, the phrase "sortez-les du papier" at the end of the article implies that the wrapping is *ex hypothesi* intact. Perhaps somebody who has a hearth and wood-ashes at his or her disposal will try the method.

Turning to modern and straightforward cookery, I observe that some critics, while speaking very amiably of my efforts in alien art on the partridge, have been

pleased to speak compassionately of my preference of plain roast bird as "very English." I hope that nothing worse will ever be said of any taste of mine; and that, as according to a famous axiom, "it is permissible to Dorians to speak Doric," so it may be permissible to Englishmen to eat English food. At any rate, though I have just given some and shall hope to give several other receipts for more elaborate dealing, I must repeat and emphasise the same preference here. A plainly and perfectly roasted grouse, with the accompaniments above referred to (or others, such as chipped or ribboned potatoes), is so good that he can in no other way be improved, though of course he may be varied. Some extreme grouse-eaters even declare that you ought to eat nothing at all but grouse at the same meal; and though I cannot go with them there, I am thoroughly of the mind of a certain wise and gracious hostess who once said to me, "I have given you very few things for dinner to-day; for there is grouse, and I think grouse *is* a dinner." Certainly it is rather wicked to eat a mere snippet of it at the end of a dinner of soup, fish, half a dozen entrées, and very likely a solid *relevé*. The soup and the fish and one entrée ought to be ample when grouse in sufficient quantity forms the roast. Also grouse forms a better "solid" than anything else that I know to finish a fish dinner with—there is some subtle and peculiar appropriateness in its specially earthy and dry savour as a contrast to the fishinesses. For accompanying vegetables nothing can equal French beans, which Nature supplies at the right time exactly, and for drinking to match, nothing can even approach claret, good, but not too good. Not "forty thousand college councils" shall ever persuade me but that it is something of a solecism and something of a sin to drink the *very* best Bordeaux with any solid

food whatever. That should be drunk with a *recueillement* which is impossible to the palate when it is simultaneously called to deal with the grosser act of eating. Let, therefore, the host, however fortunate and liberal, keep the First Three and also his best Léovilles and Rauzans, Moutons and Pichon Longuevilles, for the time when the grouse has vanished; but let him accompany it while it is being discussed with anything up to Palmer or Lagrange, or even such second growths as Cos Destournel or Durfort. Not that Burgundy (again just short of the very best) goes ill with grouse, but that claret goes better. Alexis Soyer, who, though I have heard good judges declare him to have been a much overrated cook, said some excellent things, soon to be quoted, about grouse, recommends a "little sweet champagne" with grouse. It was spoken like a Frenchman.

The accompaniments of roast grouse, besides those already mentioned, are not very numerous. The liver of the birds cooked separately, pounded and spread upon the toast on which they are served, with butter, salt, and cayenne, is often recommended. Most people are unhappy without gravy; for myself I think if the grouse is properly done, not too much and not too dry, it is better without any. The favourite, and to the general taste indispensable, bread crumbs are often horribly ill cooked, and unless very well cooked are the reverse of appetising. Soyer, as above reported by a good Scotch writer on cookery, who calls herself "Jenny Wren," liked to eat grouse, which he justly declared to vary inexplicably in flavour from year to year, "absolutely by themselves with nothing but a crust of bread," and this shows a purity of taste which makes one almost forgive him his sweet champagne therewith. Watercress is as good with grouse as with

most roasted birds, and salad almost as good as with any; though perhaps the brown-fleshed birds do not so imperatively call for this adjunct as the white. I seem to have heard that there were times and places where grouse were eaten with melted butter; but it is well known that there were times and seasons when there was hardly anything to which Britons did not add that unlovely trimming. It must be confessed that the thing is still done (the trimming being actually poured over the birds), in Scotland, where they certainly understand cookery, and where they ought to understand that of grouse in particular. But it seems to me an abomination, and it must be remembered that if Scottish cookery, admirable as it is, has a tendency to sin, that tendency is in the direction of what is delicately called "richness," and that this may be an instance. No doubt the counter-tendency of the grouse to the other original sin of dryness has also to be considered.

There is a good deal more dispute as to the time, or in other words the degree, to which grouse ought to be roasted than in regard to most other game birds. Nobody—not, I should suppose, even an ogre or a cannibal—likes underdone pheasant; and I never heard of anybody who liked underdone partridge. On the other hand, only very unfortunately constituted persons (who should not eat wild- or water-fowl at all) like wild duck or widgeon, or anything of that kind, from solan geese to plovers, otherwise than distinctly underdone. But in regard to grouse it is impossible to say that there is a distinctly orthodox or a distinctly heterodox school in this respect. The ambiguity of general opinion is shown by the variation in time—from twenty minutes to half an hour—usually allotted for the roasting of an average-sized young bird (I have even

seen three-quarters advised, but this is utterly preposterous). This amounts to the difference between a distinct redness close to the bone and "cooking through." There is even a school who would have grouse decidedly underdone. I think they are wrong, and that there should be nothing in the very least *saignant* about a grouse when he is carved, but that, if possible, he should be taken away from the fire the very minute that the last possibility of such a trace has disappeared.

The other two simple ways of cooking grouse (I suppose men do boil them, just as they boiled Lord Soulis, but I never knew a case) are broiling and conversion into soup. A broiled or "brandered" grouse is quite admirable, but must of course be quite young, plentifully buttered (or oiled), and fairly peppered. When successfully done it is like all broiled birds, one of the very best things that it is possible to eat, and can be accompanied by an almost unlimited variety of sauces or gravies, from the plainest to the most elaborate. The same hyperbole may be used of grouse soup when it is what grouse soup should be. There are considerable variations in the methods of preparing it; and, as in most cases, it is necessary to look to the end or object. Philosophically considered, the whole subject of soup may be divided into three parts. There is soup more or less clear, such as is probably at the present moment most in favour as being most restorative in effect and most elegant in consumption. There is a *purée* of creamy texture, thick, but not containing any positive solids. And lastly there is the old-fashioned broth with solids in it, which is more an *olla* or stew than a soup strictly speaking, and which, though a little robust and massive for our modern dinners, is one of the most satisfactory varieties of

food for reasonably hungry people. The first of these forms is that in which grouse soup is least commonly presented, and to which perhaps this bird lends itself least characteristically. It is, however, good in its way, and I never saw a better receipt for it than that which is given by Mrs Henry Reeve. You take old, but quite fresh birds, which may be either grouse or black-game, or (I should add) ptarmigan. You add water at the rate of three pints to the brace of birds, and keep it simmering as slowly as possible for hours, adding peppercorns and a little onion and carrot. Some time before serving you take the best pieces of the breast out (the birds of course have been cut up at first), press them and cut them up in little bits to add to the strained soup.

Purée of grouse is much more in request and—for those who can consume thick soups—much better. The apparent variety of receipts for it is great; the real, smaller. All can be reduced, with little difficulty, to a common form. The birds are roasted, but not so long as if they were going to be simply eaten—a quarter of an hour is generally held to be enough. All or most of the meat is then removed from the bones, which are put into a sufficient quantity of ready-made clear stock or *consommé*, with vegetables and seasonings to taste. This is allowed to simmer from one to three hours, the longer the better. Meanwhile, the meat which was taken off is pounded in a mortar and pressed through a sieve, some adding butter and grated biscuit or toasted bread, others ground rice, others nothing but seasoning. This paste is then stirred into the strained soup till it attains the required thickness. Celery in moderation is an important ingredient in *purée* of grouse, and some send lemon with it to table; but lemon is one of those good things

which are liable to abuse in cookery, in regard to meats and fowls. It is more at home with fish and sweets.

Of the ruder and more national form (which is also, I think, the best) of grouse soup, the celebrated stew whereof Meg Merrilies made Dominie Sampson partake was probably a variety, though the authority saith that moor-game were not the only ingredient of that soup or broth or stew. The beginning is the same as for *purée*, and indeed *purée* and this sort of soup melt into each other by imperceptible gradations. For you may either roast the birds as in the former case, cut off the best of the meat, break up and slightly pound the rest, fry it with butter, some ham and vegetables, and then stew it with good stock, in quantity sufficient (some say a quart to a bird), and after straining put the best pieces of meat in at the last moment, to warm up with a glass of claret. Or you may cut up the birds into joints to begin with, fry them in butter, and then add the stock, the vegetables and the etceteras, proceeding in ordinary soup fashion till the thing is done. Some in this last stage advocate the adding of a young cabbage in pieces, with wine or not, as liked. And as the birds have, in this case, no ordinary cooking but the slight fry, and no pounding or other mollification, it is necessary to "simmer till tender," which in the case of an old grouse or blackcock may be a considerable time. For the really hungry man this is, no doubt, the best way of all; but as a dinner dish it is perhaps, as has been hinted, too solid for the mere overture to which we have now reduced soup. In the days of the ancestors, they ate it late instead of early in the order of dishes; and I am not certain that they were wrong.

There are few things more engaging about grouse than the excellent appearance that it makes in cold

cookery, whether by itself, in salads, or in pies. Chaudfroid of grouse (it is quite useless for purists to warn us that the word has nothing to do with *chaud* and nothing with *froid*, that its being *chaud* is an accident, and that its creator was one Chauffroix) is excellent. So are grouse potted whole (baked, with wine and butter, and afterwards stowed singly into pots with clarified butter poured over), or in joints, or in pounded paste. So is the cold roast bird in the severest simplicity, especially if he has not been cut into when hot. So is grouse salad, of which a savoury, but rather violent, if not even slightly vulgar, variety assigned to Soyer is to be found in all the books with more or fewer changes. The general principle is that, the joints of not too much roasted grouse being laid on a bed of salad and fenced round with garnishings of hard-boiled egg, gherkins, beetroot, etc., a dressing of what the French would call an unusually *corsé* kind is poured over and if possible slightly iced. In the most aggressive prescription I have seen for this, no less than two table-spoonsful of chopped shallots and as much of tarragon and chervil figure. But anybody who can make a salad at all can, of course, adjust the dressing to his or her fancy, and the garnishing likewise.

Grouse pie is of a higher order than these, although the odd changes of fashion have banished it from the chief meal of the day to breakfast, luncheon, and supper, at neither of which does anything better often appear. I do not know that anybody eats grouse pie hot, though I can conceive no particular or valid reason against it. It may be made, of course, in all the gradations of pies—the homely old variety with edible crust, the "raised pie," whereof the crust is not intended to be eaten, though persons of unsophisticated habits and healthy appetite may be observed some-

times to attempt the feat—and the pie in which there is no pretence of crust at all, but which is concocted in a more or less ornamental case of fireproof china. (It was this last, perhaps, of which the poet of the Lakes, where there is much moor-game, wrote "celestial with *terrine*" though his foolish printers usually spell it "terr*e*ne.") And so the complexity of the materials and methods observes similar gradations, which by connection or accident very often adjust themselves to the three varieties of casing just mentioned. The simplest form of grouse pie merely requires the birds (jointed, halved, or sometimes whole), a proportion (a pound to a brace is usual) of rump steak cut into knobs, seasoning, crust, and a sufficiency of good gravy (which may or may not be touched up with lemon juice and claret) to fill up and moisten the mixture. To this, of course, the usual enrichments of hard eggs (whether of the domestic fowl or, as the youthful heir of Glenroy in *Destiny* suggests, plovers' eggs), mushrooms, truffles, forcemeat balls, and so forth, may be added. These additions may further be said to be customary in the raised grouse pie, and invariable in that which is made in a *terrine*. These latter forms merge themselves very much in the general "game pie," an excellent thing in its way no doubt. But I do not know that it is so good as the simple grouse pie with nothing added but steak, seasoning, an alliaceous touch of some sort, and a few eggs and mushrooms.

And so we come at last to the more elaborate varieties of cooking this noble animal. In that utterance of Soyer's above quoted he is made to confess that "his art cannot improve grouse," that in good years the flavour is such as to baffle more ornamental treatment, while in others there is nothing particular

to be done with the fowl. Nevertheless, people will do things with it; and some of the things they do must be told with the general caution, or at least opinion, that they are vanity. In the first place there is a way of pressing grouse which, since the initial process is to boil or stew the bird to rags, must be specially applicable, and should be chiefly or only applied to the very oldest specimens. Having inflicted this fiery and watery torment on them you pull the meat off the bones, season it pretty freely, and clothe it with jelly (either with ordinary aspic or by fortifying the liquor in which it was boiled with gelatine), adding eggs, truffles, and anything else you please before letting it get solid in a mould or dish. It stands to reason that this is only a way—though not at all a bad way—of using birds not otherwise eatable.

Salmis of grouse stands much higher—indeed, it is probably the best of its kind, except that made of wild duck; and inasmuch as there must always be remnants of roast birds, it is almost a necessary supplement to simpler cookery, besides being extremely good of itself. But it is necessary to remember several things about a salmis. The first is, that though the birds are always cooked first, it is indispensable that the sauce or gravy, or whatever you choose to call it, should have a thorough flavour of them, which is not to be attained by merely warming the pieces of game in it. This may be given, of course, in various ways, either by stewing the bones, skin, trimmings, and less worthy pieces of the grouse in the stock used, or by adding some *purée* or "essence of game"; but it must be attained somehow. The next thing to remember is that this gravy or sauce when finished should never be a mere bath or slop. Madame Lebour-Fawssett says it should be "of the consistency of well-made

melted butter," and I agree with her. Lastly, remember that there must always be wine in a salmis; and that it is of great importance what wine it is. English books *will* recommend port or sherry, which, in my humble judgment, are extremely bad wines for all savoury cooking purposes. Pale dry sherry is, for that end, mostly quite useless, though I own that if I were rich I should try the experiment of boiling a ham in Manzanilla. The now despised, though in its way gorgeous, "old brown" is apt to overpower every other flavour, and is too sweet, objections which apply still more strongly to port and even to Madeira, which is sometimes recommended, and which is certainly preferable to either port or sherry. Besides, all these wines, and still more the brown "cooking" brandy, which it is whispered is sometimes used, provoke undue thirst and general discomfort. A sound red Bordeaux with flavour and some body for brown meats, and a good (not an acid or wiry) Chablis or Pouilly for white, are probably the best things for the purpose. And I must again praise the French lady above cited for recommending equal parts of stock and wine as the main body of salmis sauce. The mixture is added to a foundation of well-warmed and browned butter and flour, plenty of seasoning, including herbs, some shallot rather than onion, and at the last a little lemon juice, remembering the warnings above given. Nothing more but patience, careful watching, and still greater care when the game has been put in the mixture never to let it boil, is required to make a good salmis. But all this is required, and without it the thing cannot be a success.

There is no perceptible difference between the better class of receipts for hashing grouse and those for a salmis of it. If there is any, it is that the hash gravy

may be a little thinner; but that is a matter of taste, and it is not uncommon to find cookery books in which the titles of the receipts for the two processes might be changed and little or no harm done. The fact is that "salmis" (a term of which even the great Littré did not know the origin, but which I venture to think a mere abbreviation of "salmigondis") is neither more nor less than a hash or *ragoût* of *game* or wild birds, which has had its name extended without strict propriety to the tame duck, but no farther.

Stewed grouse, which is, or was, common in Scotland, is a sort of application of the process of hashing to birds not previously cooked, and presumably old. You cut them up, fry them with butter and shallot, or garlic, take out the latter and then simmer them gently for half an hour with equal but not large quantities of stock and wine. There should be a good deal of pepper.

Grouse can of course be made into *quenelles*, *kromeskis*, *croquettes*, *salpicons*, *bouchées*, and all the other varieties of rissoles in which pounded or minced meat is conveyed into fanciful and easily consumed shapes of small size. They might be made into a *pain* or *quenelle* on a great scale; they can be soufflé́d, and are very good so. It is further obvious and easy to stuff them in roasting or accompany them in pieces with all kinds of forcemeat, from the simplest to the most complicated, from the plain liver-and-bread-crumb to compounds *à la financière* and *à la Lucullus*, in which truffles and cockscombs and the like figure. Grouse cutlets—the birds being usually halved, partly boned, fried, and then simmered in espagnole or some similar sauce—are well enough, and can be sophisticated before being served up by having truffles and other associations stuck on them. It is also sometimes

recommended that they should be prepared in this way before being made into a pie.

Most of the books contain a receipt usually stated (conscientiously) to be German, for marinading grouse which might be useful either in the case of birds accidentally kept too long or in that of very aged ones, or, as observed above, to tame the wildness of the rougher members of the tribe. Otherwise I cannot conceive it to be necessary to treat good red grouse in this way, however useful something of the same kind may be to make pork taste like wild boar, rabbit like hare, and very dry roe-venison like the flesh of a hart of grease. You take (the particulars never vary) a quarter of a pint of vinegar, a score of juniper berries, some peppercorns, and two or three bay leaves. You steep the birds in this for three days, frequently turning them and spooning the marinade over them. You then stuff them with turkey stuffing, lard the breasts, roast and serve.

But after this and the other things the mind returns from these excesses to the elegance of a good roast grouse simple of himself, with some such a feeling as that which "Neville Temple and Edward Trevor[1]" attributed long ago to Tannhäuser when

> a dewy sense
> Of innocent worship stole

over his heated brain and sense as he contemplated the Princess after his return from the Venusberg. It is true that the ingenious wickedness of some may draw a bad moral in favour of variety even from this comparison; but on their heads be it.

[1] Called among men Julian Fane and Robert Lytton. It may perhaps amuse readers of these cookery Essays to know that when I was, not long after their appearance, appointed to my chair at Edinburgh, some persons who were dissatisfied with the appointment affected to be greatly shocked because of these performances of mine. This, in the city of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* was some fun. (1923.)

IX

THE COOKERY OF THE PARTRIDGE

Nobody who has been brought up on Aristotle can be indifferent to the danger of "crossing over to another kind," or confounding arts. Therefore, in beginning to deal with matters of the art of cookery, let me at once put myself under the protection of the names of two of the greatest men of letters of their century, Mr Thackeray and M. Alexandre Dumas, who dealt with that same art, and by their action sanctioned the intrusion of all others, however far below them, who can make good their right to follow these glorious and immortal memories.

There is no room here for mere antiquarianism, and, therefore, the early cookery of the partridge may be dismissed in a few lines—all the more so for a reason to be mentioned presently. It is enough that the grey partridge (the only one which a true gourmand would ever admit to the table if he could help it) appears to be a native of Britain, and must therefore have been very early eaten by Britons. It is classed by Gervase Markham—a great writer on all subjects of domestic economy, and no mean man of letters in the early part of the seventeenth century—with pheasant and quail as "the most daintiest of all birds"; and from further remarks of Markham's it is clear that he had a sound idea as to its preparation. In the first place, he recommends for it and for all birds the process of "carbonadoing" (grilling) on what he carefully distinguishes as a "broiling-iron," an implement which, I think, has gone out of our kitchens with some loss. The broiling-iron (which, as Gervase pointedly remarks, is *not* a

gridiron) was a solid iron plate, studded with hooks and points much after the agreeable fashion of that Moorish form of torture which in his own time was known as the "guanches," and intended to be hung up before the fire, so that smoke, etc. could not get to the bird, while the iron background reflected heat against it. It thus to a certain extent resembled a Dutch oven; but, being open on all sides, must have been more convenient for basting, and must also have possessed that indescribable advantage which an unlimited and unchecked supply of air communicates to things grilled or roasted, and which is gradually, by the disuse of open fires, and the substitution of ovens under the name of "roasters," becoming strange, if not unknown, to the present generation.

There is yet another point in which the excellent Markham shows his taste. He prescribes as the best sauce for pheasant or partridge, water and onions, sliced proper, and a little salt mixed together, and but stewed upon the coals. "To this," he says, "some will put the juice or slices of an orange or lemon; but it is according to taste, and indeed more proper for pheasant than partridge." This at once shows a perception of the root of the matter in game cookery, a perception which was not too clear even to Markham's countrymen in his own day, and which, though we have gradually waked up to it, is constantly dulled by contamination from abroad. It cannot be too early or too firmly laid down that in the case of all game-birds, but especially in those which have the most distinct character and taste, the simplest cookery is the best. If anybody is fortunate enough to possess in his larder partridges proper, uncontaminated with red-leggism, young, plump, and properly kept, he will hardly be persuaded to do anything else with them than roast

them in front of the fire, cooking them not enough to make them dry, but sufficiently to avoid all appearance of being underdone, for a partridge is not a wild duck. He will then eat them hot, with whatever accompaniments of bread-sauce, bread-crumbs, fried potatoes, or the like he pleases; and those which are left to get cold he will eat exactly as they are for breakfast, with no condiment but salt and a little cayenne pepper. He will thus have one of the best things for dinner, and the very best thing for breakfast, that exists. The birds in roasting may be waistcoated, like quails, with bacon and vine-leaves if anybody likes, but with good basting and good birds it is not necessary. The more utterly "simple of themselves," as Sir John Falstaff said in another matter, they are kept the better. This is the counsel of perfection if they are good birds of the old kind, young, wild, properly hung, and properly cooked.

But counsels of perfection are apt to pall upon mankind: and moreover, unfortunately they are not invariably listened to by partridges. There are partridges which are not of the pure old kind—there are (fortunately perhaps in some ways, unfortunately in others) a great many of them. There are partridges which are not young, and which no amount of hanging will make so. There are partridges which have not eaten ants' eggs, or have in their own self-willed fashion not eaten them sufficiently to give them the partridge flavour. And there are human beings who are either incapable of appreciating roast partridges or who, in the words of a proverb too well known for it to be lawful to cite it just yet, object to roast partridge always.

The universality of these facts, or of some of them, seems to be established by the other fact, that in the case of no game-bird are there so many receipts for cooking as in the case of the partridge, which is also

of unusually wide distribution. It is true that the Continental partridge is usually, though not always, a red-leg, and that the American partridge is, unless imported, only a big and rather plebeian quail. But these facts are only a greater reason for applying the counsels of *im*perfection—the various devices for disguising the intrinsic incompleteness of the subject under a weight of ornament. It must be confessed that the result is by no means always contemptible—with the proper appliances and in the hands of a skilful artist it could hardly be so. But with some exceptions to be noticed presently, it is always something like a crime in the case of the best birds, and something like a confession in the case of the others.

To the best of my belief there are only two forms of what may be called the secondary cookery of the partridge which bear distinct marks of independence and originality. One is the English partridge pudding, and the other is the French *Perdrix aux choux*. Speaking under correction, I should imagine that the former was as indigenous at least as the bird. Puddings —meat puddings—of all kinds are intensely English; the benighted foreigner does not understand, and indeed shudders at them for the most part, and it is sad to have to confess that Englishmen themselves appear to have lost their relish for them. There is a theory that partridge pudding was an invention of the South Saxons, and has or had its natural home in the region (very lately sophisticated and made "residential") of Ashdown and St Leonard's Forests. Either because of this localisation, or because it is thought a waste, or because it is thought vulgar, receipts for it are very rare in the books. In about a hundred modern cookery-books which I possess, I have not come across more than one or two, the best of which is in Cassell's

large *Dictionary of Cookery*. It is true that an intelligent cook hardly requires one, for the pudding is made precisely after the fashion of any other meat-pudding, with steak as a necessary, and mushrooms as a desirable, addition to the partridges. But the steak, wise men advise, should not be cut up in pieces, but laid as a thin foundation for the partridge to rest upon. The result is certainly excellent, as all meat puddings are for those who are vigorous enough to eat them—only much better than most. And while it is perhaps one of the few modes in which young and good partridges are not much less good than when roasted, it gives an excellent account of the aged and the half-bred.

Perdrix aux choux abroad is a dish not less homely, though much more widely spread, than partridge pudding in England; and receipts for it are innumerable in all French and many English books. I find this succinct description (apparently half of French, half of German origin) in *The Professed Cook*, third edition, 1776, by "B. Clermont, who has been many years clerk of the kitchen to some of the first families in this kingdom," and more particularly seems to have served as *officier de bouche* to the Earls of Abingdon and Ashburnham, from whom, let us hope, that he continued, even unto Zouche and Zetland. B. Clermont does not waste many words over the dish, but thus dismisses it:

> *Perdrix à la braze* (sic) *aux choux*. Brazed with cabbages and a bit of pickled pork, with a good cullis sauce. Savoys are the best for stewing. Such as would have them in the manner of *sowerkrout* must stew the cabbage very tender and pretty high of spices, and add as much vinegar as will give it a tartish taste. This last is commonly served in a tureen, and then it is so-called. Old partridges are very good for brazing, and may be served with any ragout, stewed greens, and all kinds of purée.

This is simple enough and correct enough, but a little vague. The truth is that *perdrix aux choux* is

a dish, which, especially in the serving, admits of a great deal of taste and fancy. For instance, take three of the most recent French-English cookery-books—that of an estimable and very practical lady, Madame Emilie Lebour-Fawssett (who is often beyond praise, but who thinks—Heaven help her!—that the only reason why English people prefer the grey partridge to the red-leg is "because they are English"), the famous Baron Brisse, and M. Duret's *Practical Household Cookery*. There is no very great difference in their general directions, but the lady recommends the partridge and bacon to be, above all things, *hidden* in the cabbage; the Baron directs the cabbage to be put round the birds; and the ex-manager of St James's Hall orders it to be made into a bed for them. The last arrangement is, I think, the more usual and the best. There is also a certain difference in the methods; for while the Baron directs the cabbage to be nearly cooked before it is combined with the partridges, which have been separately prepared in a saucepan, Madame Lebour-Fawssett prefers a mere scalding of the cabbage first, and then a joint stew for two hours, if the birds are young, and three if they are old, while M. Duret, giving them a preliminary fry, ordains an hour and a half of concoction together. But this is the way of cookery-books, and without it a whole library would be reduced to a very small bookshelf. The principle of the whole is obvious enough. You have some probably rather tough, and not improbably rather tasteless birds, and you give them tenderness and taste by adding them to, or cooking them with, bacon and cabbage—"poiled with the pacon and as coot as marrow," as the Welsh farmer observes in *Crotchet Castle*. You season with the usual vegetables and sauces, and you add, partly as a decoration and partly as a

finish, some sort of sausage—cervelas, chipolata, or *was Sie wünschen*. Every one who has ever eaten a well-cooked *perdrix aux choux* knows that the result is admirable; but I do not think that it is mere prejudice or John-Bullishness to suspect that the *perdrix* has the least say in the matter.

The partridge, however, is undoubtedly a most excellent vehicle for the reception and exhibition of ingeniously concocted savours; and he has sufficient character of his own, unless in extreme cases, not to be overcome by them altogether. If I were disposed to take an unmanly advantage of Madame Lebour-Fawssett (for whom, on the contrary, I have a great respect), I should dwell on a fatal little avowal of hers in reference to another preparation—partridge salmis—that "if you have not quite enough partridge, some cunningly cut mutton will taste just the same." No doubt most meat will "taste just the same" in this sort of cookery; but salmis of partridge when well made is such a good thing that nobody need be angry at its being surreptitiously "extended" in this fashion. Salmis of partridge, indeed, comes, I think, next to salmis of grouse and salmis of wild duck. It is infinitely better than salmis of pheasant, which is confusion; and, like other salmis, it is by no means always or even very often done as it ought to be done by English cooks. There are two mistakes as to dishes of this kind into which these excellent persons are wont to fall. The first is to make the liquid part of the preparation—call it sauce, gravy, or what you please—too liquid, and, so to speak, too detached from the solid. The second is to procure body and flavour by the detestable compounds known as "browning" or by illegitimate admixture of ready-made sauces. In a proper salmis (which, it ought not to be necessary

to say, can only be made with red wine, though some English books desperately persevere in recommending "sherry" for such purposes), the gravy should be quite thick and velvety, and the solid part should seem to have been naturally cooked in it, not suddenly plumped into a bath of independent preparation.

Of the many ordinary fashions of cooking partridges it can hardly be necessary to speak here in detail. Generally speaking, it may be said that whatever you can do with anything you can do with a partridge. To no animal with wings (always excepting the barndoor fowl) do so many commonplace, but not therefore despicable, means of adjustment lend themselves. It is said that you may even boil a partridge, and that accommodated in this fashion it is very good for invalids; but I never tasted boiled partridge, and I do not think that the chance of partaking of it would be a sufficient consolation to me for being an invalid. Partridge soup is not bad, and it offers means of disposing of birds to those who in out-of-the-way places happen to have more than they can dispose of in any other way. But it is not like grouse soup and hare soup, a thing distinctly good and independently recommendable. Partridge pie, on the other hand, is excellent. The place of the steak which is used in the ruder pudding is taken by veal, and in other respects it is arranged on the common form of pies made of fowl; but it is better than most of its fellows. There will always be bold bad men who say that pigeon pie is chiefly valuable for its steak, and chicken pie (despite its literary renown from *The Antiquary*) because of its seasoning. But the partridge has a sufficient value of his own to communicate it to other things instead of requiring to be reinforced by them. And perhaps in no case is this more perceptible than in partridge pie,

which should, of course, like all things of the kind, be cold to be in perfection.

It should be still more needless to say that partridge may be grilled either spread-eagle fashion or in halves (in which case, however, as in others, it will be especially desirable to guard against possible dryness by very careful basting, or waistcoats of bacon, or larding); that he may be converted into various kinds of salad; that the process of braising or stewing may be applied without the cabbage being of necessity; that in roasting him all manner of varieties of stuffing, from the common bread variety with parsley (they use marjoram in some counties, and it is decidedly better) through mushrooms to truffles, are available. Partridges can, of course, also be potted, either in joints or in the ordinary fashion of pounding up the fleshy parts. They make, if a sufficient number is available, and sufficient care is taken in the compounding, admirable sandwiches, and like every other kind of game they enter in their turn into the composition of the true and rare Yorkshire pie, from which nothing can possibly be more different than the mixture (by no means despicable in its way) which is sold under that name as a rule. The true Yorkshire pie consists of birds of different sizes (tradition requires a turkey to begin with and a snipe to end with) boned and packed into each other with forcemeat to fill up the interstices until a solid mass of contrasted layers is formed. The idea is barbaric but grandiose; the execution capital.

There are, however, divers ways of dealing with partridges which might not occur even to an ordinarily lively imagination with a knowledge of plain cookery. I am driven to believe, from many years' experience of cookery-books, that such an imagination combined

with such a knowledge is by no means so common as one might expect. But the possession of it would not necessarily enable any one to discover for him or herself the more elaborate or at least more out-of-the-way devices to which we shall now come.

One of these (personally I think not one of the most successful, but it depends very much on taste) is a chartreuse of partridges. The receipts for this will be found to differ very greatly in different books; but the philosopher who has the power of detecting likenesses under differences will very quickly hit upon the truth that a chartreuse of partridge is merely *perdrix aux choux* adjusted to the general requirements of the *chartreuse*, which are that the mixture shall be put into a mould and baked in an oven. The fullest descriptions of both will be found almost identical, the savoy cabbage being there, and the bacon, and the sausage. The chief difference is that, for the sake of effect chiefly, since the chartreuse is turned out of the mould and exhibited standing, slices of carrot play a prominent part. They are put, sometimes alternating with sausage, sometimes with turnip, next to the sides of the mould; then comes a lining of bacon and cabbage, and then the birds with more bacon and more cabbage are packed in the middle, after being previously cooked by frying and stewing in stock with more bacon and the usual accessories. A simpler chartreuse is sometimes made with nothing but the birds and the vegetables, both bacon and sausage being omitted; and it would clearly be within the resources and the rights of science to use the bacon but not the sausage, and to introduce other varieties. For, in fact, in the more complex kinds of cookery there are no hard-and-fast rules, and the proof not merely of puddings but of every dish is in the eating.

A dish which seems at first sight to savour of will-worship and extravagance is *soufflé* of partridge. Yet it is defensible from the charge of being false heraldry, for the partridge is a winged animal, and that which restores to him lightness is not against nature. But it is important to remember that it has to be made of young birds—*perdreaux*, not *perdrix*—and like all things of its kind it is not for every cook to achieve. Yet the main lines of the preparation are simple. The meat of cold partridges is pounded, moistened, warmed with stock, and passed through a sieve till it becomes a *purée*. It is then combined with a still stronger stock, made of the bones of the birds themselves, adding butter, some nutmeg, four yolks of eggs, and two of the whites carefully whipped, after which it is put into the soufflé dish and the soufflé dish in the oven, and the whole, as quickly as possible after rising, set before the persons who are to eat it. Much good may it do them.

The *perdreau truffé* which so ravished Mr Titmarsh at the Café Foy long since (I cannot conceive what induced him to drink Sauterne with it, and after Burgundy too! it should have been at least Meursault, if not Montrachet or White Hermitage) was no doubt an excellent bird; but there might be others as good as he. The truffle, to my fancy, is rather for comparatively faint natural tastes like turkey or capon, than for a strong nativity like that of the partridge. Still, there are strong flavours that go excellently with this bird. I do not know that there are many better things of the kind than a partridge *à la Béarnaise*. All things *à la Béarnaise* have of course a certain family likeness. There is oil, there is garlic (not too much of it), there is stock; and you stew or braise the patient in the mixture. Some would in this particular case add tomatoes, which again is a matter of taste.

I have seen in several books, but never tried, a receipt for what was called mayonnaise of partridge. The bird is roasted, cut up, and served with a *hot* green mayonnaise sauce of hard-boiled eggs, oil, tarragon vinegar, and a considerable proportion of good stock, with slices of anchovy added as a garnish. It might be good, but as the bird is to be simply roasted and merely warmed in the sauce, I should say he would be better by himself, if he were in thorough condition, and anything but acceptable if he were not. The sauce, however, would be something of a trial of a good cook, if that were wanted.

Few things lend themselves better than partridges to the fabrication of a *suprême*. As there may be some people who share that wonder which Mr Harry Foker expressed so artlessly, but so well, when he said, "Can't think where the souprames comes from. What becomes of the legs of the fowls?" it may be well to transcribe from an American, at least French-American, manual one of the clearest directions I remember. It may be observed in passing that the American partridge is probably for the most part the Virginian quail, and that "over there" they have a habit of eating it boiled with celery sauce or *purée* of celery, a thing which goes very well with all game-birds, and more particularly with pheasant. But to the "souprames." "Make an incision," says my mentor, "on the top of the breastbone from end to end; then with a sharp knife cut off the entire breast on each side of the partridge, including the small wing bone, which should not be separated from the breast." The remainder of the bird is then used for other purposes, and the *suprême* is fashioned in the usual way, or ways, for there are many. This seems to be a better and more individual thing than the common chicken *suprême*,

in which the breast is if used cut into separate strips, and the size of the partridge offers this advantage.

On the other hand, the partridge *cutlet*—another fashion of securing most of the meat of the bird in a comparatively boneless condition—is begun at the other end by slitting the back and taking out all the bones except the pinions and drumsticks, which are left. Cutlets thus fashioned can be accommodated in various ways, especially by sautéing them with divers sauces. The name *cutlet* is also given to less imposing fragments of the bird, which can be dealt with of course in almost any of the myriad manners in which cutlets are served. The best known perhaps and the commonest in books, if not best in the dish, is *à la régence*. This is a rather complicated preparation, in which the birds are subjected to three different methods of cooking, the results of which are destined to be united. The roasted breasts are cut into small round pieces which serve to give distinction to artificial cutlets, formed in moulds, of a *farce* or forcemeat made of raw partridge pounded with egg, mushroom, etc. into a paste. These cutlets are then sent up in a sauce made of the bones and remnants of the birds stewed with butter, bacon-bones, herbs, wine, and brown sauce, finally compounded with about half the quantity of celery shredded, stewed and pulped to a cream. The effect is good, but the dish belongs to the family of over-complicated receipts, which to my thinking belong to a semi-barbarous period and theory of cookery.

Partridge *à la Parisienne*, on the other hand, is sound in principle and excellent in effect. The birds are browned in butter on not too fierce a fire; some glaze, some stock, and a little white wine are added, with a slight dredging of flour, pepper, and salt, and then they are simmered for three-quarters of an hour

or thereabouts, and when done are served with the sauce strained over them. Partridge *à l'estouffade* is a little more complicated, but not much. The birds are larded, put in a saucepan with onions, carrots, bacon, herbs, stock, white wine, and, of course, pepper and salt, covered up, simmered till done, and served as in the other case, with the sauce strained and poured over them. To these two excellent ways may be added, as of the same family, partridge *à la chasseur* and partridge *à la Portugaise*, which are slightly different ways of cooking the jointed and dismembered birds in butter, with easily variable and imaginable seasonings—including in the last case, of course, garlic, and the substitution of oil for butter. They are all good, and always supposing that the cook knows his or her business well enough to prevent greasiness, there are no better ways of cooking really good birds, except the plain roast. But as there will always be those who love mixed, and disguised, and blended flavours, let us end with two arrangements of greater complexity —partridge *à la Cussy* and partridge *à l'Italienne*.

Partridge *à la Cussy* is a braised partridge with peculiarities. In the first place, he is boned completely, except as to the legs. He is then stuffed with a mixture of sweetbreads, mushrooms, truffles, and cockscombs, sewn up, and half grilled, until he becomes reasonably consolidated. Then a braising-pan is taken, lined with ham, and garnished with the invariable accompaniments of partridge in French cookery—onions, carrot, mixed herbs in bouquets, chopped bacon, the bones of the birds smashed up, salt and pepper, white wine, and stock. Into this, after the accompaniments have been reasonably cooked, the birds are put, protected by buttered paper, and simmered slowly, with the due rite of fire above as well as below, which constitutes

braising proper. They are finally served up, as usual, with their own sauce strained and skimmed.

The Italian fashion is not wholly dissimilar, though it is usually given under the general head of "baking," as will be evident to every one whose idea of cookery has got past words and come to things. Indeed, though I have never seen it recommended, I should think it could be done best in what I am told is called at the Cape a "Dutch baking-pot," which is a slightly more refined edition of our old friend Robinson Crusoe's favourite method of cooking. The partridges are simply prepared as if for roasting, but instead of being left hollow, each is stuffed with fine bread-crumbs, a little nutmeg, salt, pepper, butter, parsley, and lemon juice. A sheet of oiled paper being prepared for each bird, it is spread with a mixed mincemeat of mushroom, carrot, onion, parsley, herbs *à volonté* and truffles. In the sheet thus prepared the bird, previously waistcoated with bacon, is tied up. Then he is put in a covered pan and baked, being now and again uncovered and basted. At last, after three-quarters of an hour or so, unclothe, dish, and serve him with the trimmings and clothings made thoroughly hot with stock, wine, and the usual appurtenances for such occasions made and provided.

I think that this is a tolerable summary of most of the best ways of cooking "the bird" *par éminence*. There are others which *vitiosa libido*, or, if any likes it, refined taste, has found out. Thus, before making a partridge salad you may, if you like, marinade the birds in veal stock, tarragon vinegar, salad oil, and herbs, using the marinade afterwards as a dressing. And you may play the obvious tricks of filling partridges with *foie gras* and the like. In short, as has been hinted more than once, the bird, while requiring a very little purely decorative treatment, is very susceptible

of it, inasmuch as his taste is neither neutral nor, like that of waterfowl in general and the grouse tribe also, so definite and pronounced that it is almost impossible to smother it by the commingling of other flavours. I own frankly that to my own taste these flavour-experiments of cookery should be kept for things like veal, which have no particular flavour of their own, and which are, therefore, public material for the artist to work upon. I do not think that you can have too much of a very good thing, and if I wanted other good things I should rather add them of a different kind than attempt to corrupt and denaturalise the simplicity of the first good thing itself.

But other people have other tastes, and the foregoing summary will at least show that the catchword of *toujours perdrix*—a catchword of which I venture to think that few people who use it know the original context—is not extremely happy. For with the positive receipts, and the collateral hints to any tolerably expert novice in cookery given above, it would be possible to arrange partridge every day throughout the season without once duplicating the dish.

X

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT

"They recognised imagination in the government of nations as a quality not less important than reason. They trusted much to a popular sentiment which rested on a heroic tradition, and was sustained by the high spirit of a free aristocracy. Their economic principles were not unsound, but they looked on the health and knowledge of the multitude as not the least precious part of the wealth of nations.... They were entirely opposed to the equality of man....They held that no society could be durable unless it was built on the principles of loyalty and religious reverence."

The above words, taken from the well-known preface to *Lothair*, refer, it need hardly be said, to the writer's own works. "They" are books, not men. But the passage is by no means an insufficient description of the persons and the principles that directed what is called Young England. Without an investigation which would certainly be long, and would probably be tedious, it would not be easy to trace the copyright of the adjective "young," as applied in this way to a national substantive. In the second quarter of the century Young France, Young England, and Young Ireland successively exemplified the compound in different ways. Young France was mainly literary and artistic, with a slight dash of politics, chiefly in the eccentric form of *bousingotisme*: Young Ireland was desperately political, with a slight infusion of literature; but Young England might justly claim to be a good deal wider in its aspirations than its forerunners who crowded to support *Hernani*, or its imitators who dilated on the excellence of the pike as a vehicle of reform, in the columns of the *Nation*. It was political first of all, but it took a wide view of politics, and it recognised *quicquid agunt homines* as part of the

politician's subject and material. This was its main differentia, and in this lies the excuse for the foibles which, as in all such cases, attracted most popular attention to it. No doubt some of its members paid more attention to the fringe than to the stuff: that is usual and inevitable in all such movements. No doubt some joined it for the sake of the fringe only; that is also inevitable. But any one who talks and thinks of it as of a thing chiefly distinguished by the fact that one of its heroes invented white waistcoats, and by the fact that some of its followers emulated, or suggested, the harmless freaks of Mr Lyle in *Coningsby*, and Mr Chainmail in *Crotchet Castle*, may rest assured that he knows very little about it.

It is never very easy to trace the exact origin of the complicated phenomena which are called "movements." Few people nowadays fall into the slovenly error of attributing the Reformation wholly to Luther, or setting down the French Revolution to the machinations of an entirely unhistorical Committee of Three, composed of Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau. The movement now specially before us being a much looser, and a much less striking, as well as in its immediate effects a much more unimportant, example of its kind than either of these, is proportionately more difficult to isolate and to analyse. But it is perfectly certain that it was a branch or an offshoot, whichever word may be preferred, of the great Romantic revival which affected all Europe during the first quarter of the century. This revival has been repeatedly judged in a summary fashion, and the judgments have not, as a rule, been very happy. The reason is not far to seek: it is to be found in the general omission to recognise the fact that it was a revolt, but a revolt against usurped authority, and so partook after all of the nature

of reaction and restoration. The formulas of the Reformation and the Renaissance had crusted and crystallised the literary and political, as well as to a less degree the social life of Europe: the Romantic revival cracked the crust, and dissolved the crystals. It would lead us altogether too far to attempt the general results of this process, but one special result is the special subject before us.

The political, social, literary, and religious life of England between the Revolution and the beginning of the nineteenth century had been exceptionally affected by the formulas just mentioned. It had not developed any gigantic abuses. There was no need of an English Revolution, and no general desire for one. English literature had at no time fallen into the portentous state which French literature presented when the great *philosophes* dropped off one by one. The Church of England was orthodox in belief, decent in conduct, and influential in the State. But everything was conventional, and often most absurdly and contradictorily conventional. Morals were somewhat loose, but the code of manners was extraordinarily strict. The country was a free country, but the franchise was quaintly allotted, and seats were sold in the open market. The Government was a party Government; yet from the fall of Bolingbroke to the rise of Liverpool there were not half-a-dozen statesmen who can be labelled as distinctly Whig or distinctly Tory in principle. The free and independent elector was the Omphalos of the constitution; but it was understood that the free and independent elector would for the most part vote for members of certain houses, or those who were favoured by certain houses. It was the country of Shakespeare; yet men of genius and talent wrote *Irene* and *Douglas*, and did not put them in the fire when they had written

them. It was the country of Arthur (at least of the Arthurian legends) and Harold, of Cœur de Lion and Becket, of Chandos and Chaucer, of Occam and Scotus; yet people talked contemptuously of the "dark ages," and never willingly looked beyond 1688, except to pay a regulation compliment to Queen Elizabeth and the Reformers. Of course there were exceptions to all this, but the general sentiment was as described. The sense of historic, social, literary, religious continuity was, if not lost, at any rate dulled. The pattern politician never looked beyond William the Deliverer: the pattern divine made as deep a trench at the Reformation as did his controversial opponents. Nobody, except a few eccentrics, could give a political reason for the faith that was in him, save from the Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement; and the Thirty-nine Articles in the same way closed the ecclesiastical horizon. English poetry began, by grace of Dr Johnson, with Cowley; as for English social life, it began and ended with the conventional environment of the individual, with the fashion of the family, "the town," the neighbourhood, the Court, or what not.

All this the Romantic movement, and its accompaniment the French Revolution, burst up in different ways; and most of those ways concern us a little, for most of them had something to do with Young England. It gradually drew into itself, or would have drawn, if it had ever become really powerful (for it must be remembered that it was, as far as direct effect went, very much of a failure), the dandyism of Byron and D'Orsay, the mediævalism of Scott, the Anglicanism of Coleridge and Wordsworth. It never, perhaps, as a matter of history, moulded these various things and others into a doctrine of politics and sociology so coherent as that which its most illustrious politician

formulates, somewhat as an after-thought, in the motto of this essay, but it assimilated them more or less unconsciously. Among the numerous synonyms of the strictly meaningless terms, "Tory" and "Whig," "traditional" and "doctrinaire" perhaps deserve a place. The Young England movement was in all things traditional in its revolt against eighteenth-century convention, just as its enemy the Radical party was above all things doctrinaire in carrying out the same revolt. The Radical could find no logical reason why men should not be equal in privileges, and proposed to make them so: Young England pointed out that they had never been equal historically, and proposed to leave them as they were. The Radical could think of nothing better than *laissez-faire* for the regulation of social problems apart from the question of political and religious privilege: Young England had an amiable, if somewhat visionary, theory of mutual assistance which in a different form has been oddly enough taken up by some Radicals of to-day. With regard to the Church and the aristocracy, the Radical, after trying in vain to argue down to them from his general principles, would have none of them: Young England had its memory filled with the exploits of both in the past, and its imagination with the possibilities of both in the future. It was thus at once, and in a remarkable fashion, both reactionary and innovating. It proposed to employ innumerable forces which the official convention of the eighteenth century ignored; but they were all forces to be connected with—to be geared on to, so to speak—the traditional machinery of Government and society, in order to bring into play many wheels which the convention of the eighteenth century had neglected and left idle.

One of these forces was literature. The pen was, of

course, no new power in politics, but it had latterly been considered a weapon for the irregulars. NoPrime Minister, between Bolingbroke and Canning, left a literary reputation; Pulteney, and other statesmen who followed Pulteney, wrote chiefly in secret. This was, of course, the merest convention. It had no precedent before the eighteenth century, but the contrary; it had no foundation of reason whatever. Accordingly, the Young England movement was essentially a literary movement, and not least a literary movement applied to politics. The very dandies were not dandies merely, but wrote as earnestly as they dressed. They saw no reason why a gentleman should not be a gentleman of the press, and none why a gentleman of the press should not be a gentleman. In that there appears nothing at all extraordinary now. But when it is remembered that, by no means in the earliest days of the *Edinburgh Review*, Macvey Napier's contributors minced and made difficulties, which may yet be found in his correspondence, on the subject of receiving cheques, it may be seen that it required some courage to take the style and title which Mr Disraeli took upon himself in the face of Parliament. The members of the movement, and especially one member, did more than despise the disqualification; they removed it. And in so doing they probably made not their least shocking innovation to steady-going Whigs and Tories, who looked on political writing, if not on all writing except that of an occasional poem or book of travels, as professional and undignified.

It is no part of the object of the present essay to go through the list of the men who took part in the movement. To mention the dead without mentioning the living would be incomplete; to mention the living would be to enter on that domain of gossip and personality

which, in the present day especially, faithful servants of history and literature are especially bound to eschew[1]. The worst enemies of Young England can hardly deny that it was a singularly wide-reaching movement. The literature of it corresponds to its width of reach, and any review of that literature would be impossible in the present limits. It had dandy literature, poetical literature, political literature—literature of all sorts and kinds. If it could have assumed a general motto, probably no better one could have been taken than a sentence from the *Life of Lord George Bentinck*: "The literary man who is a man of action is a two-edged weapon." Some of its devotees went in for tournaments, some for social reform, some for society, some for politics, some for art. It would scarcely be unfair to claim for Young England, in different ways, Pugin and the "Graduate of Oxford," Rossetti and "Felix Summerly." It had an extraordinary influence on the Universities, a still more extraordinary influence on the estimate of artistic matters in the press. All this, it may be said, was a matter of fringe—to use the phrase which has been already adopted. Be it so; but the fringe is part of the garment, and it is the part which most catches and touches outward things.

[1] The remark still applies, though the ranks have been still further thinned. To one person thus removed, to Lord Houghton, the invention, not merely of the name, but of the movement itself, has sometimes been attributed. The next time that I met him after writing the essay reprinted in the text, he said to me, "I wish you had told me you were going to write that. I could have set you right on a great many things which nobody knows now except Lord John Manners," and he added, what indeed I knew, as to Mr Disraeli, "He had nothing to do with it at first; he came in afterwards." I suggested to him that he had much better write the history himself, and he replied that he had thought of doing so, but "he was too old and it was too much trouble." However, on further persuasion, he said he would think of it; but I heard nothing further of it, and his executors do not seem to have found anything. The Duke of Rutland is now, I think, the very last survivor of the inner *cénacle* (1892). And now of course there are none (1923).

Fortunately, however, we are not reduced to arguing from mere retrospect. There is to be found, by any one who looks in the British Museum, a remarkable book, entitled *Anti-Coningsby*, and published in the year 1844. It is a very unequal book, and very badly planned; but there are passages and phrases in it which would not do discredit to Mr St Barbe himself. At the end of this book there is a satirical programme of a *Young England Journal*. The chief points in this programme may not be uninteresting, and are certainly unimpeachable as evidences of what was supposed by contemporaries to be the tendency of the movement. There are five points in this hostile representation. The *Young England Journal* will contain "slashing politics on both sides"; that is to say, it will advocate measures irrespective of the convenience of special sections of the actual governing cliques. It will contain unusually active foreign correspondence; that is to say, it will try and interest the average Briton in something beyond the cackle of his bourg. A very strong point is made (with the evident expectation of a laugh) over the "History of Cricket," which a young peer will write in it. Another deals with the statistics which are to be given as to "the use of the new wash-houses." Lastly, a dead set is made on the display which will be made in the *Young England Journal* of "the virtues of Puseyism." These are the five points —omitting minor and personal matters—which the satirist marshals in his ironic charge against Young England. They were not of the orthodox Whigs or the orthodox Conservatives; they tried to interest Englishmen in the doings of the foolish foreigner; they took an interest in athletics; they condescended to such degrading particulars as the new wash-houses (washing-houses, to be very exact, is the form which our

satirist prefers); and they held up the virtues of Puseyism.

Now let us look at these objects of the scorn of 1844 through the spectacles of half[1] a century later. It may be as well to assure a sceptical generation that they were not drawn up of malice prepense by the present writer. They happen, indeed, to have been published before he was born. But I think, if we look at public matters to-day, we shall hardly find that the subjects to which the *Young England Journal* was supposed to be about to devote its attention, have been thrown into that dust-bin which in fifty years infallibly accepts political crotchets that have not life in them. "He was not of God," said Rochester of Cowley, profanely, doubtless, "and therefore he could not stand." The crotchets of 1844 have certainly stood. It would be very hard to bring the politics of either or any party to-day under those of one of those two "sides" which the scribe of fifty years ago indignantly assumed that all respectable people must adopt. We are not quite so indifferent about foreign correspondence as he seems to have held that we should be, and it will even be found on inquiry that nearly all the most interesting events of the last thirty years have concerned that matter[2]. The subscribers to a journal of to-day would hardly feel scorn (except in so far as in the course of years the thing may have become stale) at a person of title writing a history of cricket, and athletics do not now occupy exactly the position which the satirist evidently thought they ought to occupy. Have we taken up his cue of sublime contempt of wash-houses, or have we interested ourselves more and more, as years have gone on, in wash-houses and all their kind? There are still, no doubt, varying opinions about the

[1] Now nearly a whole (1923).

[2] And now? (1923).

virtues of Puseyism; but it must be a singular social historian who will deny that what was at that date called Puseyism has grown and spread, and in itself or its offshoots gone far to cover the land in the last fifty years. So the satirist's own Young England is at any rate tolerably justified of its works by the progress of time. The demolition of that purely selfish party spirit which saw all things in the conquest or retention of "twelve hundred a year," is something; the breaking down of the merely insular conception of English politics, is something; the development of the physical education of the people, is something; *sanitas sanitatum* is something; the revival of vivid religious emotion and the knitting afresh of the connection of religion and art, is something. These are truisms—propositions almost shameful to be advanced, because of the impossibility of denying them. Yet a belief in these propositions is what our satirist of the last century charges on Young England. On his head be it!

It is scarcely possible to reiterate too often the caution that the conscious and the unconscious tendencies of this particular movement cannot be too carefully separated. It has just been seen that, if an enemy may be trusted, the description of the Young England crusade, given in the early part of this essay, is unimpeachable. No one can say *Quis vituperavit?* for we have the vituperation. But no doubt the movement was in many ways a blind movement. The very multiplicity of its aims, the diversity of its tendencies, the range of its sympathies, probably prevented most of those who took part in it from taking anything like a catholic survey of the field and the campaign. The accounts of its greatest leader are too characteristically fantastic to be accepted literally. They are more or less true as summaries of the facts, but they are not

to be taken as absolutely trustworthy analyses of the motives. It is partly from looking at the results, partly from examining, as we have here examined, the testimonies of opponents, but most of all from comparison of the state of rival parties, that the true nature of this generally abortive yet specifically fruitful movement becomes evident. To the political student who has some experience in English history, the middle third of the century is a sufficiently dreary time, unless he has the gift of looking before and after. The ineptitude of most regular Whigs and Tories, each convinced that the country must be ruined if it did not employ them, and too many of each willing to ruin the country if it bade them do so as the price of employment; the opportunism of the Peelites, as dull and as selfish, but destitute of the traditional orthodoxy which half excuses the others; the doctrinairism of the Radicals, dullest of all and least irradiated by any sentiment, though faintly relieved by a certain intellectual consistency, make up a grisly procession of phantoms flitting across the political stage, in a manner no doubt supremely important to themselves at the time, but singularly forlorn to the posterity of spectators.

Amongst these the men of the Young England movement cannot be said to present a uniform or logically compact appearance. They are scattered, uncertain occasionally, futile often, running after a dozen hares at once, frequently failing to catch any. But they are at least generous, intelligent, conscious of the past, hopeful of the future, awake to the changed circumstances of modern life, and ready, each in his self-willed and confused way, with a plan of living to meet those circumstances. Some years ago we had a certain saying of Mencius held up to us in a Radical journal

(I always like to quote authorities which cannot be suspected of extreme sympathy with my subject) as "worthy to be written in letters of gold in every legislative hall and municipal chamber in the country." The maxim is that, "if the people are made to share in the means of enjoyment, they will cherish no feelings of discontent." I do not know whether Young England read Chinese; it certainly had no legislative hall or municipal chamber of its own. But the motto was its motto from the beginning. Long after it had as a movement merged in the general stream of progress, Peacock, who had satirised its earliest forms in *Crotchet Castle*, returned as a kind of ghost to the world of novelists in *Gryll Grange*. He then found a new development to laugh at. The young peer did not equip a baronial hall or write (to the deep disgust of the author of *Anti-Coningsby*) on the history of cricket; but he lectured, and he was "pantopragmatic." It is thirty years [now sixty] since *Gryll Grange* was written, but young peers are expected to lecture and be pantopragmatic quite as much as ever. That is an offshoot of Young Englandism; whether good or bad, it is not to the present purpose to decide. It is sufficient to point out the numerous ways in which the movement did actually influence English life.

For, on the whole, the influence actually exerted was no doubt more social than political. It was of the very nature of the movement to blend social and political matters, and so in the long-run the social influence, transformed in the process, became a political one. But directly in the fusion of classes, or rather in the interesting of one class in another while retaining their division, and still more indirectly in its religious and artistic developments, Young England promoted a quiet social revolution. The historian of the future, if

not of the present, will hardly hesitate about his answer to the question, Which have done the most for social progress, the Radical doctrinaires with their *reductio ad absurdum* in the Charter, or the advocates of cricket and wash-houses and libraries, of friendly communication between classes, of the spread of art, of religious services attractive to the general?

These latter ideas have of course long ceased to be the property of one party, political or other. In scuffling they change rapiers on that as on other stages, and the result is apt to be confusing to all but careful observers. The real tendency of the Young England movement is, as always, to be sought far less in the writings of those who supported it, than in the writings of those who opposed or stood aloof from it. A search on this principle, between 1840 and 1850, with a certain margin on either side of the decade, will not leave much doubt as to the real influence of the thing. Nowhere, for instance, is that influence more apparent than in the early writings of Charles Kingsley, certainly not a sympathiser with it or with many of its developments. Indeed, to trace the ramifications of agreement, dissent, protest, and silent adoption of more or less of the tendencies of the movement, would be to make a survey of the literature of the period. It is perceptible no less in *Past and Present* (far removed as Carlyle was from sympathy with Young England) than in the *Broad Stone of Honour*, little less in *The Princess* than in *Coningsby*. If the greatest literary name of the period, next to those of Carlyle and Tennyson, was rebel to its influence and wrote chiefly against it, that is because Thackeray was, in the first place, a satirist before all, and, in the second place (like Mr Pendennis), singularly weak on politics and general history, and extraordinarily John Bullish in his prejudices. Young

England was not John Bullish—it might, perhaps, have been a little more so with advantage—and it certainly presented a good many handles to the enemy who had command of irony. It was exceedingly easy to represent its members as belonging to "the order of the *gilets blancs*," and it was not so easy for an admirer of the eighteenth century to forgive the contempt it poured on that period. The difference is of little importance now. Indeed, cynics who see all things in letters may be rather grateful for it as having given us the admirable parody of *Codlingsby*, and the scarcely less admirable caricature-retort of St Barbe. It has only been mentioned here because, with what it is hard to regard as anything but simple stupidity, some good people have thought to show their allegiance to Thackeray by scoffing at Young England. That is not the attitude of the critic, who does not take sides in such matters.

To sum up the social purport of the movement, Young England aimed at loosening the rigid barriers between the different classes of the population by the influence of mutual good offices, by the humanising effects of art and letters, by a common enjoyment of picturesque religious functions, by popularising the ideas of national tradition and historical continuity, by restoring the merriment of life, by protesting against the exchange of money and receipt for money as a sufficient summary of the relations of man and man. These were undoubtedly its objects; it would be difficult to show that they were the objects of any other party, school, sect, or class, at the time. But (and this is really the chief feather in the Young England cap) they were objects so obviously desirable that no one school, especially no one so loosely constituted, could monopolise them. English social life at large has, to

a great extent, fallen into the lines thus indicated. It has been generally without much consciousness of the indicators, and often with not a little expressed ingratitude to them; but this matters very little to the historian. Parties much more definite, leaders much more one-ideaed, persistent and successful, have before now gone long without recognition, longer without gratitude. But recognition, if not gratitude, comes sooner or later to most, and it may fairly come now to the despised patrons of cricket and wash-houses who afforded so much amusement to our satirist.

The political *mot*, on the other hand, of the Young England movement was not very different from Lord Beaconsfield's famous boast. It introduced the "gentleman of the press" to practical politics; it made the politician a gentleman of the press. Before 1830 political government had, in the first place, been recognised as belonging more or less to a select circle of families and officials, and, in the second, it has busied itself with a very restricted range of subjects. Social matters rarely came before Parliament, though they sometimes forced their way in—just as outsiders sometimes forced their way into political place and power. The purpose, whether clearly or dimly understood and expressed, of Young England was to break down the monopoly while retaining the advantages of aristocracy; to enlarge the sphere of the politician, and to increase the number of levers on which he can work. It was opposed as much to the mechanical alternation of ready-made sets of governors which it found in existence, as to the mechanical manipulation of the constituencies which has grown up since its time. Whether in such a country as England the ideal of a nation following its "natural" leaders (be their letters of naturalisation due to birth or won by brains), feeling

the historic estimate sufficiently to prevent change for change's sake, or for mere class interests, yet open to improvement, was a chimerical ideal or not, there is no need to attempt to decide here. But of one thing there is no doubt, that Young England was the most striking political result among us of the vast Romantic revival which influenced literature and religion so vitally; and that in establishing the impossibility of separating political from social questions, it had in its turn at least one result which cannot fail to be permanent.

For polemical purposes certain persons have called it a harlequinade. We make much allowance in England for polemical purposes, and some of the persons who so call it know that it was much more than a harlequinade. It was indeed, as has been pointed out, in many ways a failure. It had, according to that Scriptural doctrine which has been a favourite in our time with men so different as Guizot, Lord Tennyson, and M. Renan, to perish in order that it might produce its effect. The men who took part in it had too different and perhaps too inconsistent motives to bring it to any complete end. It lacked a general programme and a single purpose. Brilliant as was the talent of many who took part in it, none of them, perhaps, had that single-hearted and single-minded insanity of genius which carries a movement completely to its goal. But there is sufficient evidence to show that Young England on detached points was prophetic as well as enthusiastic, and that it divined and helped the tendency of the times in a manner which secures for it a place, and no mean place, in the social and political history of the country[1].

[1] It is perhaps of some slight importance to remember that this was written 40 years ago as nearly as possible midway between the date of the subject matter and to-day (1923).

XI

THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS[1]

It is perhaps too much the custom of those of us who earn our bread by surveying mankind from China to Peru, and writing daily or weekly articles on politics, to take things as they come weekly or daily, and indulge in no further reflections on them. Some indeed have said that it is not the custom of the present day to indulge in further reflections upon anything; and there are even those who, going yet more to extremes, add that it is a very fortunate thing, the affairs of the moment, and especially the political affairs, being remarkably ill-suited to bear reflection of any kind, above all the "further" kind. Once it was different, and the political article of the day took the form of *The Character of a Trimmer*, or *The Conduct of the Allies*. Let it be allowed to a political journalist of some years' standing—than whom nobody can be more conscious of the difference between himself and Halifax or Swift—to muse for a while, in the temper of their musing if not with the merit of their expression, on the latest of modern revolutions, the revolution which had the happy thought of making the centenary of 1789 practical. And let this musing take for its subject, first, some expressed opinions on the birth of the Brazilian Republic, then Republics themselves, Brazilian and other.

It was natural, no doubt, that the action of the patriotic Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca and his band of

[1] Written shortly after the expulsion of the Emperor Dom Pedro of Brazil. The experiences of the Brazilian Republic since have not weakened whatever force there may be in these *Thoughts*. [Nor those of others since. 1923.]

brothers should attract most and earliest comment from sympathisers. Mr Gladstone told us, as an afterthought, that his own benediction on the infant Republic was bestowed in respect rather of the unobtrusive and unsanguinary manner of its birth than of its Republican character. Not all commentators showed even this Epimethean cautiousness. One bird of freedom (I forget its actual perch, but it was somewhere between Maine and Florida) clapped its wings at once over the fact that its own species were now crowing from Cape Horn to the St Lawrence—the bird forgot Honduras, where the shadow of tyranny still broods, but no matter. Echoes of the crowing in England asked how any one could wonder that a people should prefer managing its own affairs to having its affairs managed for it, even by a sovereign of liberal ideas, benevolent aspirations, culture, scientific acquirements, and so forth. And some dispirited Monarchists seem to have found little to reply except in groans, after the manner of a Greek chorus, that a Republican dog should have been found to bite so good a man as Dom Pedro. Whether the Brazilian Monarchy had, at any rate for some half century of its not much longer existence, been much more than a Monarchy in name; whether the substitution of Senhor Deodoro da Fonseca for Dom Pedro d'Alcantara was much more than a case of *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*; whether a Republic established by a handful of soldiers and schemers in one or two great towns of a thinly peopled country covering half a continent could be said to have any meaning as an expression of popular will—these were questions about which none of the eulogists of the Brazilians for daring to be free troubled themselves. But what they troubled themselves about least of all was a set of questions lying much further back—the

questions: What is a Republic? Is there more freedom under a Republic than under any other form of government? Is it physically possible for a Republic to conduct public affairs on Republican principles, if those principles are summed up or even distantly indicated by the phrase "managing one's own affairs instead of having them managed by somebody else," or, as that eminent politician, Mark Twain, prefers to put it, "every man having a say in the government"?

In considering these interesting questions we shall receive much assistance from one of the copious telegrams in composing which the Provisional Government of Brazil appeared to delight. "It is a mistake," says the Provisional Government, "to suppose that it [the Constituent Assembly] will have to decide between the Republic and the Monarchy. The Monarchy is out of the question—the Constituent Assembly will only have to organise the Republic." And again: "Every attempt to disturb the peace shall be stamped out with unflinching severity." These authoritative declarations of Republican principles, set forth by the youngest and therefore perhaps the most infallible, certainly the least fossil, of Republics, are very welcome and very instructive to the thinker on that form of polity. He might have thought (if he had been a very inexperienced thinker) that it was the business of a Constituent Assembly to constitute: he now sees that it is only its business to accept something already constituted. And he might have thought (but here he would certainly have shown himself yet more inexperienced) that if there was one thing that a Republic could not consistently do it would be to "stamp out with unflinching severity attempts to disturb the peace"—that is to say, translating official into plain language, attempts to change the government. The cardinal principle of

the Republic is, one is told, the management of one's own affairs. One, being a Brazilian, tries to do this: and, lo! there appears on this side a grave pundit, pointing out that it may only be done in one particular way; and on that side a valiant marshal still more significantly ready to stamp out anybody who wants to do it in any other. There is plenty of *imperium* so long as a sufficient number of Fonsecists are ready to follow their Deodoro; but where, oh where, is the *libertas*?

It would, however, be extremely unphilosophical to visit this inconsistency on the heads of the Generals Marmalade and Lemonade, the *rastaquouères retour de l'Europe*, the lawyers in want of a place, and the journalists with great French pseudonyms, who made the Brazilian Revolution. It is theirs by race—they are at least Republican in this little weakness. If it is too much to ask lazy memories of recent years to go back a quarter of a century and compare the almost contemporary methods of Wittgenstein and Sherman, to draw the parallel and strike the balance between the fate of the kingdom of Poland and the fate of the sovereign states of Virginia and Mississippi, let us take more recent and less alarming instances—for example, the incidents of a certain contest between persons of the names of Tilden and Hayes, not so very long ago, or the eminent exploits of M. Constans in France yet more recently. *Nec Sthenebœa minus quam Cressa*: there is uncommonly little to choose between the methods in any case just cited or referred to. Whether the people has to be made to exercise its peaceful rights in the way that is best for it, or whether its unrighteous attempts to "disturb the peace" have to be "stamped out," they are all in a tale, from never mind what autocrat to Fonseca, Barbosa, Constant, and Company. 'Ah! but," says our friend of the last years of the

nineteenth century, "what a difference! Here you are stamped out by a tyrant: there by the majesty of the people." Now, for my own private part I should have an almost equal objection to be stamped out by anybody. But from the point of view of my friend, I should have an infinitely greater objection to be stamped out by the majesty of the people; and it may not be impertinent—since in most political discussions of the day it seems to be wholly forgotten—to indicate the point of this doubtless most unreasonable view.

Your Monarchy (at least your real Monarchy, for it may be admitted that the constitutional variety, though it keeps the main structure of theory, has rather endangered the argumentative buttresses) is thoroughly logical. For the purpose of governing, you discover or invent a species different from the governed —not necessarily better (that is the error of Mr Andrew Carnegie and his likes)—but different and indisputable. You may be as good a gentleman as the king, but you are not the king, and as you can't become the king you are neither jealous of him not feel yourself degraded by his existence. *C'est son métier à lui d'être Roi*: it is your business on your part to be loyal. There is no competition: therefore there is no emulation: therefore there is no ill-feeling. The bulls in Egypt who had not the Apis marks might as well have been jealous of the bull that had. And these things being so, the right of the king to cut off heads, to impose laws, to "stamp out," is quite unquestionable. If you want to question it you take your life in your hands, you rebel, and you win or you don't. If you don't, it is part of the game that you should be "stamped out," and no reasonable man who plays quarrels with the game. You go to the gallows, the block, the garrotting chair, as Mr Thackeray says somewhere, with "manly re-

signation though with considerable disgust"; but you do not feel that any one has altered the laws of the game while you were playing. In a less tragic and more conventional state of things there is the same consolation. A law is passed, and you do not like it. You have fought against it to the utmost of your powers; you have voted against it; you have written the most admirable and unanswerable articles against it. But it is passed, and you submit. Why? Not because it has passed the Commons, whom you elect in part, whose majority, if against you, has been elected by persons who were your own equals (to say nothing less); not because it has passed the Lords, whose political position you admit as an excellent thing, but to none of whom do you pay any more personal respect than to any other gentleman. Hundreds of Bills pass both Houses separately: several every year merely miss the double passing by accident. All are waste paper till they receive the Royal Assent. It is the Royal Assent that you obey. They tell you it cannot be refused: but what does that matter? The important point is that, "cannot" or no "cannot," nothing is valid till it is given. You are not bidden to obey by Johnson or Thompson, but by the king; if you disobey, it is the king who hangs you, not Thompson or Johnson. The game is played throughout: and let me repeat, no rational man minds losing when the game is played.

But the Republic never plays the game. Its whole force, its whole appeal, rests on the consent of the citizens, just as the force and appeal of the Monarchy rest either on the negation of that consent altogether or on the hypothesis that once given it cannot be retracted. And yet, as the Brazilian Government so kindly pointed out afresh to us, it cannot get itself constituted, it cannot carry on government for a week

or two, without casting consent to the winds and levelling rifles at dissenters. It is quite heart-rending to think of the sufferings of a logical victim of any anti-Republican counter-pronunciamiento at Rio. Keen are the pangs of being stamped out in any case, but keener far to feel that you are being stamped out contrary to the laws of the game. The nation, let us say, consists of a hundred persons. Fifty-one vote for a Republic, forty-nine wish for a Monarchy. Man for man, vote for vote, there is no conceivable difference between the value of the individuals and the value of their desires; yet the purely accidental, irrelevant, and irrational fact of fifty people agreeing with A and only forty-eight with B, gives A the power to tyrannise over B just as much as any Pedro, cruel or cultured, would do. B's liberty becomes, for the nonce, a quantity negligible and neglected—it is his *ex hypothesi*, but if he attempts to use it he is stamped out. This is bad enough, but worse remains behind, a still more hideous self-contradiction. Fifty-one persons, as we have said, vote for a Republic, the fiftieth and fifty-first being, let us say, João and Beltrão. A week, a day, an hour afterwards João and Beltrão change their highly respectable minds. It may be that the actual revolution has not recognised their merits sufficiently in the distribution of spoils. It may be that a real counter-revolution has effected itself in their opinions. But whatever the cause, the two fall off, attempt to assert their new principles, fail, the power being in the other hands, and are stamped out. Now, reflect on the horror of this, which is a much more exquisite horror than the other. Not only are these two poor men stamped out in defiance of the Republican principle that the citizen's political affairs shall be managed by him, not for him, but they are now actually part of the majority—the

minority having become such by the transference of their voices. Therefore they ought to be hanging others instead of being hanged themselves; therefore a most ghastly act of high treason to the Republic is being committed; therefore (always on strict Republican principles) Freedom ought to shriek over them as loud as over Kosciusko, and much louder than over Kossuth.

Here the practical man, the practical Republican, finding that he cannot (as indeed it is quite impossible) find any technical flaw in this unpleasant chain of reasoning, will doubtless cry, "This logic-chopping is all very fine, but it is purely academic. You know very well that no government can be carried on unless the will of the majority is deferred to; unless that majority is supposed to remain intact for some more or less considerable time; unless the central authority puts down breaches of the peace." Unfortunate practical man! In less than half a dozen lines he has accumulated all the worst fallacies, the most degrading sophistries (according to Republican argument), of the politics of despotism. The paramount importance of order, the right of the strongest, the necessity of obeying convention, the superiority of expediency to justice—all the tyrant's pleas, all the sycophant's justifications, here they once more rear their horrid heads and hiss their poisonous venom. Not a word has the practical man said, not a single way or byway of argument has he indicated, which would not justify Jeffreys and bear Bomba harmless through. On the Monarchical side his arguments are good enough and consistent enough. It is, indeed, the common-sense basis of the Legitimist-Monarchical contention that to obviate civil dissension and disorder by making the possession of supreme power dependent, if not upon some essential quality, yet upon some inseparable and incommunicable acci-

dent, is the first object of politics, and that everything must give way to this. The Republican who admits this, or anything like it, is lost.

And he is more lost still if we meet him on another part of the field, a very favourite part with him, the question of personal dignity. To listen to democrats of the Carnegie stamp one would imagine that the true subjects of a Monarchy were always and necessarily tormented with a sense of inferiority to their "betters." We have already seen how far this is from the truth, though it may be admitted that it gives an interesting light on the point of view of those who say it. *They*, it is clear, have this uneasy sense of being in the presence of "betters." And, indeed, it would be odd if they had not. It is impossible to imagine anything more galling to the sense of personal dignity than existence as one of the minority in a Republic. You are by hypothesis as good as the President, of equal political rights with the President, as well entitled to have your say (*vide* Mr Clemens) on any matter as the President. And yet —as if there never had been any godlike stroke of Brutus, any Rütli, any Lexington, any Jeu de Paume —the President can give places, can sanction legislation, can even, as few haughty monarchs dare to do, veto it. And you can do just nothing at all but shoot him, which exposes you to the most unpleasant consequences. Even if you got out of this by regarding the President as a gilded slave, as your paid man, as a creature handshakable *à merci et à miséricorde*, there remains the abominable inequality of Jones, conferred upon Jones by Equality, and not tempered by any possible considerations of the sort. If Jones happens to be a member of the majority, and you happen to be a member of the minority, you are for years practically the slave of Jones. You may not politically do or say

the thing you will, but the thing that Jones wills. You make war with foreign nations at the discretion of Jones; you violently object to a disgraceful peace with them, and Jones quietly makes it; you are an ardent Free-trader, and Jones studies with practical success to make you, in your capacity as citizen, a Protectionist more wicked than the late Sir Richard Vyvyan himself; you are a non-interventionist, and Jones sends the ironclads, for which you pay, to bombard harmless towns; you like an honest glass of beer, and Jones sends you to prison if you drink it. This is "managing your own affairs"; this is Liberty; this is Equality; this is having a say in the government. And the only possible consolation—that perhaps after the next election you may take your revenge on Jones, may make peace with his enemies and bombard his friends, may sweep away his tariff and give instead a State bounty to every brewer and every distiller—ought not, if you are a real Republican, to give you the slightest comfort. Ejuxria or Utopia ought no more to be governed in opposition to the wishes of a free Ejuxrian or Utopian like Jones than it ought to be governed in opposition to your own. You are as false to your principles in tyrannising as in being tyrannised over. Perhaps it is a hidden sense of this hopeless contradiction, of this inextricable dilemma, that has made Republicans from time to time so fond of the maxim, "Be my brother or I will kill you." Only when all the citizens are your brothers in opinion, or when you have killed all who are not, can you get the Republic theoretically to work. And alas! you know very well that if you did get it so to work there would be a split next day. You must do the thing that Jones wishes, and you do not; or the thing that Jones does not wish, and you do. In either case you are false to your principles; in one case you

are a slave (and therefore degraded), in the other a tyrant, and therefore (see all the Republican copy-books) much more degraded than a slave.

It may seem, then, necessary to inquire a little how it is that anybody consents to live under such an odious and illogical form of government; next to inquire further how it is that any one can be found to exchange more intelligent varieties for it. As to which points there were much to be said. The candid man will confess on the one hand that even in these restless days people are by no means inordinately given to examining the first principles of their beliefs; on the other that Monarchies themselves have for many years taken to playing with Republican principles so much that a little confusion is inevitable and excusable. But there are some considerations which may be put. In the first place your Republic (*teste* its great expositor before cited) offers every man "a say in the government." He doesn't get it: as I have humbly endeavoured to prove, it is practically impossible that he should get it; but it is offered him—it is the gold piece in the child's pocket. Then the Republic tells him that he is "as good as anybody else." He is not: it proceeds to show him as much in the very first division where he happens to be in the minority; but it tells him that he is, and he believes it. Furthermore, the Republic appeals, as no Monarchy can possibly appeal, to the gambling instinct in human nature, to the instinct of vanity, and to the instinct of greed. Let me guard promptly against the charge of having duplicated in the matter of gambling and greed. They are not the same instinct by any means. Under the domination of greed a man makes for certain gain, and is purely actuated by considerations thereof. Show him that he may even probably lose and his zeal is cooled at once. The gambling

instinct is quite different. Here the element of attraction is not certainty but uncertainty; the prospect of gain is alluring, no doubt, but it is rather a question whether the risk of loss has not something alluring in it also. The real point is the chance, the uncertainty, the gamble: so much so that men have often been known to venture quite disproportionate stakes in business, in sport, in love, in war, simply for the excitement, for the "flutter."

Now, in all these points the Republic has more to offer than the Monarchy. Its general bonus, the attraction of "no ticket without a prize" which it offers, is addressed to vanity. It is dear to the uninstructed and unintelligent man to be told that he has no betters, that he is as good as anybody else. The instructed and intelligent man knows that if twenty Constitutions brayed these assertions at him through twenty thousand trumpets they would still be false. A would be handsomer, B taller, C more gifted, and therefore it matters very little to him whether D is more "privileged." The *ultima ratio* of relative value after all depends on a man's own estimate of his own worth, and is not affected by any Constitution. But to the majority, who are either not conscious of possessing any worth at all, or painfully doubtful as to the accuracy of their own judgment, it is no doubt comforting to be told that they are as good as anybody else. At any rate it would seem to be so. And so the Republic hits the majority of its birds on this wing.

Others it hits from the point of view of downright greed. This is not a pleasant consideration, but men are what they are. There can be no question either with any historical student or with any student of actual politics that "Republic" usually spells "corruption." It always has been so; it is so; in the nature

of things it must always be so. No doubt Monarchies have known plentiful waste and plentiful malversation of public money; but the thing has been limited to comparatively few persons, and has always had more or less specious excuses of services rendered, or of the giving away of property which was the king's property, not the nation's. It was a Republic which invented the plain, simple, unblushing doctrine of "the spoils to the victors," and long before a Republic had formulated the doctrine, almost all Republics had favoured the practice. To make the most out of Jones while you have the upper hand of him; to lay up for yourself as much as possible against the evil day when Jones shall have the upper hand of you—this stands, if not to reason, yet to human nature. The king is always restrained to a certain extent by simple considerations of prudence; it is not worth his while to kill the goose for the sake of the golden eggs. The temporarily dominant party in a Republic is under an exactly opposite temptation. Why keep the goose for the possible, nay certain, benefit of the abominable Jones? To which it has to be added that, pretend the contrary who may, it is impossible to feel a genuine sense of duty towards what is only an exaggeration, to the *n*th power, of oneself. The sole claim which a Republic has to the obedience, the respect, the loyalty, of each man is his own consent to it; and his respect for its property must necessarily, however loudly on his moral days he may proclaim the contrary, be conditioned by that fact. He says—not as a personal brag, not as an exaggeration, but as a plain statement of logical and political first principle—*L'État c'est moi*. Nor is it at all surprising that he should go on, "The property of the State is my property," and proceed to effect restitution of the said property to its owner.

But most of all does the Republic appeal to the gambling element in man. Under the Monarchy, the big prize is by hypothesis unattainable; even the middle chances are usually and in practice restricted to a small, or comparatively small, number of persons. And not only the actual distribution of the loaves and fishes, but the whole course of public life generally offers much less of the temptation of the unforeseen than is the case under the Republic. In some examples thereof every other man you meet may be said, without much exaggeration, to be an ex-Minister: and if that seem not a very delightful state it has to be remembered that every ex-Minister hopes to be Minister again, and that every one who looks upon an ex-Minister says to himself, "What he was yesterday I may be to-morrow." The famous jest of the old, the real, Revolution, to the unfortunate producer of title-deeds centuries old, "If you have had it so long, citizen, it is time for some other citizen to take his turn," is hardly a burlesque of actual Republican sentiment, and not a burlesque at all of the unspoken hope which makes men Republicans.

And so the Republic scores by its appeal to perhaps the strongest, and certainly the most widely diffused of human weaknesses—vanity, greed, the love of the uncertain and the unforeseen, while it hardly loses by its congenital unreasonableness and self-contradiction. It always flatters, though it often deceives; it sometimes gives solid rewards, it almost invariably excites, stimulates, interests, allures. The Monarchy, on the other hand, satisfies little but the reason, which is not usually the governing part of that animal which is good enough to call itself rational. It hurts the snob's self-love, it leaves nine greedy men out of ten unfed and without hope of food, it is regular, punctual, hum-

drum, not interesting. If at crises and intervals it provides opportunities for the display of virtues and graces as rare and delightful as the vices of the Republic, both ordinary and extraordinary, are disgusting, this only happens now and then. Not every day, nor once in every century, shall the words "I have kept the bird in my bosom" fit Sir Ralph Percy's lips. Whereas the particular felicities of "*Respublica*—the public thing," are to be found at any moment quite facile and ready. She is always ready to tickle vanity, to promise satisfaction to greed, to bait the gambling trap with hopes. Therefore, it would appear, she is rather on the winning hand just now, and hopes to be even more so. And if these hopes be realised, the joyful future condition not merely of statesmanship, but of taste, manners, learning, arts, and most other things that make life worth living, may be very easily learnt from the past, and found pretty plentifully illustrated in the present[1].

[1] Not *quite* inappropriate in 1923?

XII

TWENTY YEARS OF REVIEWING (1873–1895)

If a writer or lecturer on Reviewing had no further desire than to amuse his readers or his audience at the least cost to himself, he could hardly do better than make a cento of extracts from authors on the subject of reviewers. There would certainly be no lack of matter; and as certainly there would be no lack of piquancy in what there was. As Mr Pendennis remarked of his uncle and Captain Henchman, that he was "sorry to say they disliked each other extremely, and sorry to add that it was very amusing to hear them speak of each other," so may it be said of authors and reviewers. Indeed the comparison is more than usually appropriate, for as Captain Henchman and Major Pendennis belonged after all to the same class, so also do reviewers and authors.

However, it is not my present purpose to compile in this fashion, and we may content ourselves with two key-notes uttered in harmony by perhaps the two most dissimilar writers of genius in England in the early years of the century—William Cobbett and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Cobbett, in triumphant comment on his own *English Grammar*, asserts that fifty thousand copies of it have been sold, "without its ever having been mentioned by those old shuffling bribed sots, the reviewers." And Shelley, in one of the cancelled sentences of the preface to *Adonais*—sentences cancelled, not out of repentance, but because he preferred to put the thing differently—informs us that "Reviewers, with some rare exceptions, are a most stupid and malignant race." Putting aside "old"—which

cannot, I think, be predicated nowadays of at least the majority of reviewers—and "sots," which is irrelevant and actionable,—these two sentences from the most ethereal of great poets and the most prosaic of great prose-writers pretty well sum up the general indictment. Bribed, shuffling, stupid, malignant to worth and genius, neglectful of it when not malignant. That is what authors (when they are not reviewing, which often happens) say of reviewers.

But it is not all that is said. Persons, sometimes really impartial, sometimes affecting impartiality, and, at any rate, not merely abusive or indignant, ask what is the good of reviewing; whether any man who has real knowledge and talent would not be much better employed in creative, or at any rate substantive, work, than in simply commenting on the work of others; whether the habit of reading reviews does not provide an unhealthy substitute for the habit of reading the books themselves; whether the diversity of equipment to begin with, and the diversity of verdict in the end, do not make reviews almost impossible as instruments of instruction or edification of any kind? I have even known odder charges than these made, and complaints raised that the reviewer, by extracting (yet, on the other hand, one meets with complaints that he does *not* extract), spoils the author's market, and in fact violates his copyright. In fact, the reviewer is in even worse case than a celebrated heroine of one of the poets, who hated reviewers worst in his own peculiar fashion, and who, to do him justice, had no very great reason to love them. He is a being whom "there are few to praise and not a soul to love."

I do not on this occasion hold any brief for the reviewer; but as it has long seemed to me that there is not only a good deal of passion in some of the things

that are said against him, but a considerable deficiency of knowledge in very many of the things that are said, if not against yet about him, it may not be uninteresting to hear what a reviewer of pretty considerable experience, who has given up reviewing, has to say on the subject[1]. I had had rather more than twenty years' practice in reviewing at the time I gave it up; and during the greater part of that period I think my practice was about as extensive and various as that of any of my contemporaries. I have written reviews in half-a-dozen lines and reviews in forty pages. I have reviewed books in classics, in mathematics, in history, in philosophy, in geography, in politics, in the fine arts, in the arts of war by land and sea, in theology, in cookery, in pugilism, and in law. I have reviewed "travels and novels and poems," at least as many as ever did the aforesaid Mr Pendennis. I have, though very rarely indeed, and always under protest, reviewed books with the printer's devil waiting to carry away the sheets to press as they were written.

I once (by no offer or intrigue of my own, but simply because as many editors, unasked, sent the volume to me) wrote five different reviews of the same book. And if any one unkindly says: "In short, you were a reviewer of all work, and refused none," I can clear myself from that imputation. For I once refused to review a book in Syriac, because I do not know a word of that language; and I always refused to review books on the currency, because I have (for reasons based on observation) made it a rule to refrain from under-

[1] This was written because I had, when appointed to my Chair in Edinburgh, deliberately given up the practice as incompatible with my new position. I am not sure now that this was not Quixotic: it certainly lessened my income by some useful hundreds a year, and impaired to some extent my touch on the pulse of current literature. But I held to it pretty firmly during the twenty years which followed these other twenty (1923).

standing anything whatever about that subject. I can thus, at least, plead experience, and as I never wish to write another review of the ordinary kind[1], I can also plead complete disinterestedness.

In one respect this paper may be found disappointing, for I have no mystery of iniquity to reveal, no "Satan's Invisible World" to display. No doubt there are venal reviewers, and no doubt there are spiteful ones; there are, I presume, rascals and shabby fellows in all professions, vocations, and employments. If a man has strong private or party animus, and no very high sense of honour, he will no doubt make up his mind, as we know Macaulay did in Croker's case, to "dust the varlet's jacket for him" when he gets hold of a book by a person whom, for either reason, he dislikes. Nay, as there are many people who have the fortunate or unfortunate gift of being able to convert their likes and dislikes into ethical and intellectual approval or disapproval of a quasi-sincere kind, the dusting will, no doubt, often be done with a sense of action *ad majorem Dei gloriam*—with a conviction that it is a noble action and a virtuous one. But, once more, these curious self-delusions, as well as the more downright and unquestionable indulgences in evil-speaking and evil-doing, are not peculiar to reviewing. There may be a little more temptation to and opportunity for them there than elsewhere: but this temptation and this opportunity are reduced to a minimum if the editor has his wits about him and does his duty. Of course, editor and reviewer may be in a conspiracy; but I do not believe that conspiracies are more common in reviewing than anywhere else. They exist, doubtless, in some cases: but in most they are simply figments of

[1] True at the time, but *on revient toujours*. The professorship ceasing, the reviewer revives (1923).

a very well-known and only too common form of mania, and sometimes figments, half-ludicrously and half-pathetically contrary to the fact.

The most curious instance of this that I ever knew was as follows: There was once upon a time a not undistinguished man of letters whom we may call A; and there was, contemporary with him, a busy reviewer whom we shall call B. B, with his name, reviewed, not by any means savagely, but with rather qualified admiration and some strictures, a volume of A's poems. Some time afterwards he was told that A was what is familiarly called a skinless person; and not finding any particular amusement in tormenting, thenceforward, when a book of A's came in his way, praised it if he could, or let it alone. On one occasion B received through an editor a letter of thanks from A for an anonymous review of his. But after A's death, which happened some years later, B learnt that A had been under the constant idea, and had frequently declared to his friends, that he, the said B, had been "hounding him anonymously throughout the press for years!" Of course nothing can be done with or for such *Heauton-timoroumenoi* as these. No praise is ever sufficient for them: all blame is undeserved, interested, malignant. But in cases of real personal enmity or friendship, or of very strong disapproval on religious or political or other grounds, I think there is a very simple rule for the reviewer. If the book of a friend which you cannot praise, or that of an unfriend which you have to blame severely, comes to you—send it back again. The right of silence is the only one of the Rights of Man for which I have the slightest respect, or which I should feel disposed to fight for.

It has also to be remembered, when the subject of unfair and biased reviewing is under consideration,

that, at any rate nowadays, when reviews are very numerous, and when no single vehicle of them enjoys dictatorial reputation or influence, such reviewing does no very great harm. It is unpleasant, of course. If a man say he likes it nobody believes him, even though a gratuitous advertisement that one is not connected with certain journals may be a distinct compliment, and a kind of present. A once well-known member of the House of Commons amused it not so very many years ago by avowing his terror of the "Skibbereen Eagle." It was no doubt not shared by his hearers; but it may be doubted whether any one of them would not have in fact preferred, though only by a faint preference, praise in the "Skibbereen Eagle" to abuse in it. Yet it is hardly conceivable that the abuse can really damage any one; and it sometimes, when unskilfully and extravagantly indulged in, creates a distinct revulsion in favour of the victim. It is certain that the dead-set made many years ago in certain quarters at the late Mr Froude's historical work determined more persons than one to take a more favourable view of it and of him than they might otherwise have taken; and I think there have been similar cases since. At any rate, to my mind deliberately unfair and partisan reviewing does much less harm than the process known as "slating" for slating's sake, or than the old and constantly revived notion that an author is mainly, if not merely, something for the critic to be clever upon. But of that we shall speak presently: some other matters must come before it.

For it will probably not be undesirable to inquire before going any further what a review ought to be, as a not useless preliminary to the discovery what ought to be the nature of a reviewer, and whether reviewing is a benefit or a nuisance *per se*. And in this

inquiry we may start by clearing up a slight confusion which, like other slight confusions, has caused no slight error. I take it that a review in the general sense is addressed to and intended for the benefit of the general congregation of decently educated and intelligent people. There may be a special kind of review which is addressed to specialists, and which must be written for them by themselves. A scientific monograph, which purports to tell what further progress has been made in some particular department of chemistry or physiology, cannot in the proper sense be "reviewed." Its results can be abstracted; its conclusions, if they are disputable, can be argued for or against; corollaries or riders can be indicated or suggested by the expert. But as such a thing is never, except by accident and once in a thousand times, literature—as even when it is literature its literary character is accidental—it does not lend itself to review. For, once more, a review, as I take it (and the taking is not a private crotchet but a mere generalisation of actual practice and fact during the two centuries or a little more which make the life of the review), is a thing addressed to the general body of educated people, telling whether it is or is not worth their while to make further acquaintance with such and such a document purporting to bear their address. As the circle of knowledge which is supposed to be open to the general reader and to come within the range of literature widens, the circle of reviewing will widen too. But it will always remain true that the way in which the author has done his work is the main if not the sole province of the reviewer.

Has he formed an allowable, an agreeable, a fairly orderly conception of his subject? Has he shown decent diligence and accuracy in carrying this conception out? Does his book, if it belongs to the literature of know-

ledge, supply some real want? Does it, if it belongs to the literature of power or art, show a result not merely imitated from something else? Has it, if a poem, distinct characteristics of metre, word-sound, style? Does it, if a work of argument or exposition, urge old views freshly, or put new ones with effect? If it is a novel, does it show grasp of character, ingenuity in varying plot, brilliancy of dialogue, felicity of description? Can you, in short, "recommend it to a friend" for any of these or any similar qualities. Or can you even recommend it—the most disputable and dangerous of the grounds of recommendation, but still perhaps a valid ground in its way—because you like it, because it affects you pleasurably or beneficially, because you gain from it a distinct nervous impression, a new charm, or even, as Victor Hugo put it, a "new shudder"?

A review which observes these conditions will, whether it answers the questions in the negative or the affirmative, probably be a good review, always keeping in mind the inestimable caution of Hippothadée to Panurge, *si Dieu plaist.* On the contrary, there are certain other questions and conditions which will almost certainly make any review conducted under their influence a bad review. Such questions—for it would be more than ever impossible to put them all—are as follows. Do I—to begin nearest to the debateable ground with which we finished the last list—Do I dislike this book, without being able to give myself or others any distinct and satisfactory reason why I dislike it? Do I like or dislike the author, his opinions, his party, his country, his University, or his grandmother? Does the book run counter to, or ignore, or slight some published or private opinion of mine? Is it, without being exactly contrary to, different from

something which I might have written or should have liked to write on the subject? Is there something else that I like better? Does it display more knowledge than I have, and so make me feel uncomfortably at a disadvantage? Is it about something in which I take no particular interest? In such cases the proviso of Hippothadée will have to be turned round, and we shall have to say that unless Heaven pleases very specially, it is likely to be a very bad review indeed.

For the reader will not get and cannot get from it a trustworthy answer to his legitimate question, Is this on the whole and on the author's own conception of his task—the said conception being not utterly idiotic —a fair addition to the literature of the class which it intends to reach? He will only get an answer to any one or any combination of a large number of other questions which he has not asked and to which he does not care in the least to know the answer. He has asked, Do you as a judge think that I ought to read, or may at least with chance of profit and pleasure read, this book? He is in effect answered: I, not as a judge but as a most unjudicial advocate or even party to the other side of the cause, wish you not to read this book or to think badly of it if you read it. But I have put on the judge's robes, and deliver my opinion from the bench or a substitute for it, in hopes to make you accept my pleading as a sentence and my evidence or assertion as a verdict.

It is this danger which, not always in appropriate words or with very clear conceptions, is urged by the opponents of reviewing: and no doubt it is in a certain measure and degree a real one. We shall see better what this measure and degree is by shaking out the subject into some different shapes and lights.

Reviewing, like everything else, has a tendency to

fall into certain vogues, into certain channels or ruts, where it continues for a time, and then shifts into others. The most common, the most obvious, and apparently to some views, friendly as well as unfriendly of the subject, the most natural, is that of "slating," as modern slang has it, though the thing is very far from modern. The principle or mock principle on which it depends was never put with a more innocent frankness than in the *Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur* of the *Edinburgh Review*; and though when it is thus stated it becomes almost ludicrous to a really critical critic himself, there is no doubt that it reflects the idea of the critical profession as conceived by outsiders, and even as practised by a large part of the profession itself. We have only, it is true, to carry out the analogy suggested by the phrase to see its absurdity. Her Majesty's judges do not deem it their duty to regard the entire body of her Majesty's subjects as guilty till they are proved innocent; nor even those who on *prima facie* suspicion are brought before them. The *Edinburgh* motto would at least seem to infer that every book is to be regarded as bad until it is proved to be good. And further, as the functions of a judge of court are limited to condemnation or acquittal—as he is admittedly travelling rather beyond them even when he observes that the defendant leaves the court without a stain on his character—so it would seem that positive praise, that the assignment of decorations or titles of honour, is not part of the function of the critic at all.

Yet, absurd as this notion is, ill as it will stand the slightest examination, there can be no doubt that it is frequently entertained, and by no means uncommonly put in practice. We have all read—it would appear that even some of us have enjoyed, though I confess it always

seemed to me from my youth up that there was no drearier reading—monotonous series of "slashing" reviews, in each of which some wretched novel, deserving at worst of a dozen lines of merciful and good-humoured raillery, was solemnly scourged round the town in two columns of laboured cavilling and forced horse-laughter. And we have all read likewise—some of us let it be hoped with a devout prayer to be kept from imitating it—the pert yet ponderous efforts at epigram; the twentieth-hand Macaulayese of "will it be believed" and "every schoolboy knows"; the uplifting of hands and averting of eyes at a misprinted date, and an imperfectly revised false concord—in short, all the stale tricks and stock devices of the "slater."

Of course there are books which well deserve the utmost extremity[1] of criticism; and nobody can have practised reviewing long without having—not in the least upon his conscience but on his memory—instances in which he has had to do his duty, and has been well entitled to ejaculate *Laissez passer la justice de Dieu!* But the conception of the ideal reviewer as a Judge Jeffreys doubled with a Jack Ketch is, as has been said, quite ludicrously narrow; and it turns, like so many other things, upon a mere fallacy of equivocation, the double meaning of the word "judge." The critic *is* a judge; but he is a judge of the games as well as of the courts, a caliph or cadi rather than a Lord Chief Justice or a Lord Chief Baron. He can administer sequins as well as lashes, and send a man to ride round

[1] It being remembered that this extremity stops dead short at insolence. If you can't kill your man like a gentleman with a rapier, or knock him out like a stout yeoman with fist or quarterstaff, keep out of the ring. Stiletto and poleaxe, sandbag and scavenger-shovel are barred. I fear I may have "most politely, most politely" made some authors uncomfortable: but I am sure I was never rude and never hit below the belt (1923).

the town in royal apparel as well as despatch him to the gallows. Or rather, to drop metaphor, his business is in the main the business of judging not the man or the merits of the man so much as the work and the nature, rather than the merits or demerits, of the work. If he discern and expound that nature rightly, the exposition will sometimes be of itself high praise and sometimes utter blame, with all blends and degrees between the two. But the blame and the praise are rather accidents than essentials of his function.

Partly from a dim consciousness of this; partly no doubt in reaction from the excesses of Jack Ketchishness, reviewing very often wanders into other excesses or defects which are equally far from the golden mean. It is sometimes openly asserted, and perhaps more often secretly held that it is the critic's chief duty to praise—that he ought to be generous, good-natured, eager to welcome the achievements of his own time, and so forth. This, no doubt, is a less offensive error than the other; it is even a rather amiable one, and it has the additional attraction that, as it is much more difficult to praise, at least to praise well, than to blame, there is the interest of seeing how the practitioner will do it. But, after all, it *is* an error; and I am afraid, though a less superficially offensive, it is a rather more dangerous error than the other. It is seldom that real harm is done to any one—except perhaps to the critic himself—by over-savage reviewing. Excessive praise does harm all round; to the critic (at least if he gives it sincerely), because it dulls and debauches his own critical perceptions; to the public, because the currency is debased, the standards of literary value tampered with and obscured; to the author most of all, because while his human weaknesses will of themselves prevent him from being injured by the blame, they will help

the praise to spoil him. Especially dangerous is the form of praise—very common just now, as it is in all periods when a great literary generation is just fading away, and its successors are shining with rather uncertain light—the form which insists that our side or our time is the equal of any other. I saw the other day that a critic in whose original work I take great delight, and whose criticism is always careful and generous, speculated on the beatitude which future generations would attribute to him in that he had seen in one week, I think, the publication of four masterpieces. I shall say nothing of these masterpieces themselves; I have not read them all, and I defy anybody to outgo me in cordial appreciation of some of the work—I mean Mr Kipling's—to which "Q" referred. But I cannot help thinking that it is a little dangerous to indulge in such a *Nunc Dimittis*. If the critic, say thirty years hence, finds his admiration of his Four Masters unchanged, or even heightened, it will be time to tempt Time himself by such an utterance. But Time is as dangerous a person to tempt as Providence; and that "wallet at his back" contains among its other alms for Oblivion, or worse still for an occasional memory of contempt, no small number of these admiring encomia on the unequalled happiness of particular periods and the mastery of particular achievements.

Yet again, reviewers, afraid of or disinclined to mere blame, and having no taste or no opportunity for mere praise, very frequently take refuge in a sort of wishy-washy, shilly-shally attempt to keep clear of either, or else in a mere "account rendered," which is rather an argument of the book than a review of it, and yet as different as possible from the argumentative exposition above commended. I have seen it frequently complained—sometimes by partisans of the "slating"

or the "gushing" review respectively, but also by others—that the shilly-shally kind is particularly prevalent nowadays. Perhaps it is, and for reasons of which more later. It is certainly not a good thing. If a man has not time, or knowledge, or ability, to sum up decidedly what a book is, and how it is done, he had better be sent about his business, which is evidently not reviewing. If it is the fault, as no doubt happens sometimes, and perhaps in these days rather often, of the book itself, then that book had much better not be reviewed at all. But I confess I think myself that, except in the case of scientific works, as above referred to, with official reports and other books that are no books, the mere *compte-rendu* is the worst review of all. It argues in the reviewer either a total want of intellect in general or a total want of understanding of the particular matter; it fills up the columns of the paper to no earthly purpose; it disappoints the just expectations of author, reader, everybody, except, perhaps, the publisher, who may like to see a certain space occupied by a notice; and it is a distinct insult to the eyes before which it is put. If I were an editor I should ruthlessly refuse to insert reviews of this kind, no matter who wrote them.

And yet it is a question whether they are worse than another kind which is very popular with editors and the public, though it may be rather less so with authors. This is the kind, or rather group of kinds, for there are many sub-varieties, of the review which is not what the Germans call *eingehend* at all, which simply makes the book a peg, as the old journalist slang, by this time almost accepted English, has it, on which to hang the reviewer's own reflections, grave or gay. To this practice in the longer reviews, which appear at considerable intervals, there is no great objection. It has

given us much of the best critical and general work of the century. Quarterlies at least can never hope now and could never hope to any great extent to introduce books to readers for the first time; and, besides, the prefixing of the title of a book or books to such articles is a perfectly understood convention. But in a review proper, a review which presumably the reader is to see before he sees the book, and which is to determine him whether that book is worth seeing or not, the practice seems to me to be improper, impertinent, and very nearly impudent. When the late Mr Anthony Trollope made Post Office inquiries on horseback, simultaneously (or at least on the same day) using the horses which he kept for the purpose as hunters, it was perhaps the furthest recorded instance of making the best of the two worlds of business and pleasure, duty and off-duty. But Mr Trollope did make the inquiries; nobody, I believe, ever charged him with remissness in that. The reviewer of the class to which I refer keeps the horse at the expense of the author, and uses him for the pleasure of himself and the reader only.

Nevertheless, in the more unfavourable examples of all these varieties, even of the first to some extent, I think we shall find that Ignorance as usual is more to blame than malice, and not Ignorance of fact so much as what we may call Ignorance of Art. I am sure that my late colleagues in that art, at least those of them who are worth considering, will not find fault with me for this admission, which indeed need gall no one who does not feel that he deserves galling. We have all been in the same boat, and I am only, so to speak, coaching from the bank. I do not think that reviewers deserve a good deal of the evil that is said of them; but I do think that something of this Ignorance of Art is, especially in beginners, rather the rule than the

exception. Of ignorance of fact I shall say little. It exists of course. I remember some one—it was Mr John Morley, I think—being once magisterially taken to task by a critic for using such an affected word as "incarnadine," the critic thereby, I need hardly say, showing a slight ignorance of another author—not Mr Morley—whom we are all at least supposed to know. I have much more recently seen a plaintive and ingenious expostulation with an author for speaking about the subject of his book in a way showing considerable familiarity with the subject but not illuminative to the critic, when as a matter of fact the author's remarks showed a very distinct *un*familiarity with that subject. But though a reviewer should certainly know Shakespeare, and though it would be at least well that he should not review a book about, let us say, Syriac without knowing it, it is, as I have already said, a blunder to require specialist knowledge in all cases. A good sound education in the tongues and the liberal arts, with the knack of putting oneself at the special point of view by resorting if necessary to the best standard authorities, combined with some portion of the critical talent and some knowledge of the critical art, will do infinitely better than specialist knowledge, which not infrequently hampers that talent and interferes with the practice of that art by interposing "idols" of more kinds than one. But the education and the experience in the Art itself are indispensables; and it is a question whether they are not rather often dispensed with.

It is the less invidious to admit this as an open question, or even to answer it in the affirmative that, as things go, a man can very rarely help himself. I am as sure that there is an Art of Criticism as I am sure that there is no Science of it. But until very recently,

when in more Universities than one or two the institution of Honours Schools in English Literature has led to something like a systematic study of literary criticism, there has not been in England, or Scotland either, anything of the sort. The Professors of Poetry at Oxford—by an honourable tradition which the names of Warton, Keble, and Mr Arnold have made not only honourable but illustrious, and which later incumbents have maintained—have done what they could; but the opportunities of that Chair are scanty and passing. The Scottish Chairs of Rhetoric have had more opportunity, and excellent work has been done in them; but until the institution of Honours they have been hampered by the necessity of levelling down to a pass standard. Even abroad there has been much less done than seems to be fancied by those who think that all things are better ordered abroad than at home. The famous French professors, from Villemain downwards, have not, as a rule, escaped that curious note of parochiality—of seeing all things in *French* Literature—which marks the nation: the Germans, incomparable at philology, are notoriously weak on the literary side of criticism. It is true that the Oxford School of Literæ Humaniores, which has acted for a hundred years better up to its name and to the genius of literature than any teaching machine of any University in the world, has always taught men a little directly and a great deal indirectly in this kind. But the direct teaching has been very little: and I understand that it has rather lessened than increased of late years. And the constant shortening of University training, with the multiplication of examinations, has done positive harm. I question whether, limited as was his reading and too often narrow as were his views, a man who left Oxford or Cambridge in the seventeenth century, after

the usual seven years' course, was not much better qualified as a reviewer than he who now leaves them after four or at most five. He had mastered the "Rhetoric" and the "Poetics" which, grievous as are their gaps and huge as are the blinkers which were on Aristotle's eyes, still contain the root of the matter. He had read no small quantity of good literature; most, if not all, of it with no direct purpose of examination. Above all, he had had time to think about what he read, even if he had not actually thought. Dryden, no doubt, was Dryden—a man of genius, and of not very quickly developing genius. But if he had written the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* at two-and-twenty, and just after scrambling through his tripos; instead of after seven years at Cambridge and as many more of reading, and a little (not too much) writing in London, I do not think the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* would be what it is.

For, after all, study of literature, range in it, opportunity of comparing different kinds, of remembering the vastly different estimates held of different works, or even the same work at different times—are of even more importance to the reviewer than formal teaching in criticism. The latter will save him a great deal of time and trouble, will put him and perhaps keep him in the right road; but it will not accomplish the journey for him. The journey itself must—except in those cases of exceptional genius for the art which may be neglected, as they occur in all arts and are not common in any—be performed; and it is only at the end of it, or rather (for that end never comes) at a fairly advanced stage of it, that a man becomes a really qualified reviewer.

It will follow from this that the number of really qualified reviewers can never be very large; and from that again that it is quite possible to have at any given

time rather more reviewing than is altogether expedient. It would perhaps be wiser to say nothing on this head; for, to alter my old friend the *Oxford Spectator* a little, "the large and well-armed tribe of reviewers" is ill to offend by one who has himself renounced their weapons though he remains exposed to their aim. But I confess that I think there is at the present moment a little too much reviewing, and I may say so freely, because I shall not be suspected of any trade-union jealousy. No doubt books have increased, and readers have increased, in the last thirty years. There are more libraries; the great multiplication of clubs and the increased habit of supplying them with new books must be considered; there may even be more book-buying. But I am not sure that these things of themselves necessitate a larger proportion of reviewing: and reviewing itself has certainly increased rather out of than in proportion. At the beginning of the last third of the nineteenth century there were in London four or five weekly reviews at the most which had any repute; reviews in the daily London papers were quite uncommon things, and betokened perhaps special merit, certainly special favour; while out of London there was hardly any daily or weekly journal throughout the United Kingdom which carried much weight in reviewing, and there were extremely few that attempted it, at least on any large scale. I need not say how different is the case now. The number of weekly papers has increased: the great and deserved vogue of the *Pall Mall Gazette* at the very beginning of the period of which I speak made reviewing a special function of the newer London evening papers: while, owing to the example rather of the great English provincial newspapers and of those of Scotland, than at the initiation of the London dailies themselves, almost

every morning newspaper which aims at any position now at least attempts a complete review of the books of the week, in allotments varying from some columns to some lines.

This might on the face of it look as if, to quote Dryden's words as those who dislike reviewers might quote them—

> The sons of Belial had a glorious time.

I am not so sure of it, either from their own point of view, or from others. In the first place, there can, I think, be no doubt that the individual review and even the "chorus of reviewers," indolent or otherwise, has lost some of its old authority. There are so many reviews that even the simplest person who believes in the newspapers, if such a man there be, cannot attach absolute importance to any one of them; they come out so thick and so fast that any mark made by a single one on that elastic target the public apprehension is quickly effaced by others; and the variety of their utterances, where these utterances are distinct at all, cannot but do them some harm. And if they lose some of their effect from these causes which are not their own fault, they perhaps lose more from others which are. If there is any truth in what I have said above—if the old adage, "it is hard to be good," applies at least as much to reviewers as to others—then this extreme multiplication of reviews, this increase in the rapidity with which they are required, must have some slight effect of damage on the review itself. A reviewer is made at least as slowly as an A.B.: and we all know what comes of manning fleets, not even with pressed men, but with casual volunteers. It is true that the evil is to some extent mitigated by the fact—well enough known to experts—that though at one time it was rather uncommon for a man to write in more than one paper,

any man who establishes a reputation for reviewing in London may now, if he chooses, write for a dozen, and is nearly sure to be asked to write for a dozen. But this in its turn does some harm. I have hinted that I do not think the practice of doubling reviews, if carried out honestly and industriously, so abominable as some people think. But I must own that there is something in what was once said to me by the late Mr Harwood, who kept himself in what would seem to these days almost incredible abstinence from publicity and self-advertisement during his long tenure of the editorship of the *Saturday Review*; but who was known to his contributors as a marvel of experience, patience, good sense, and assiduity in his office. He had already sent me a book when I received it from another editor; and I called upon him to ask whether he had any objection to my duplicating. He was good enough to say, "No, I don't mind *your* doing it; but I am not fond of it as a rule. If the reviews are unfavourable, it is scarcely fair to the author; and if they are favourable, it rather deceives the public." It cannot, I think, be denied that there is a good deal of force in this. Moreover, it will necessarily happen that if a man has a great deal of reviewing work thrown on his hands, and if, at the same time (as the conditions above enumerated make almost certain), his editors would much rather have short slight reviews from him than long and careful ones, he will—I shall not say scamp his work—I think very few gentlemen of the press do that—but (let us say) do what is required of him and no more.

On the other hand, the great mass of reviewing cannot possibly be done by these few men, and it is doubtless done by others. The result of course varies inevitably in quality, from work as good as the most practised hand can turn out down to that class of work

which is described by a catchword very rife just now among men of letters, I believe, as "done by the office-boy." And I have been told and indeed partly know that this evil is attended by another, which though a little delicate to speak of is very serious. Those who have studied the history of newspapers and periodicals, know that the extreme disrepute into which newspaper writing generally, and reviewing in particular, fell at the end of the eighteenth century coincided with an "office-boy" period—in other words, with a period when it was handed over to wretchedly paid hacks of all work, or even to volunteers, who for vanity, or spite, or pastime, or what not, would write without any pay at all. These were the days of Southey's "seven pounds and a pair of breeches" for six months' reviewing—I cannot be certain of the exact figures, but it was something about as absurd as this. The establishment of the *Edinburgh*, with its hard-and-fast rule that everybody was to be paid, that everybody was to take his pay, and that the pay itself was to be fair, was the turning-point from this state of things, and until quite recently reviewing of the better class, if not a magnificently, was at any rate a fairly well-paid profession. People will grumble at anything of course. But for my own part I do not think that any one but a very great man can consider himself underpaid when he receives, as used to be the average, three pounds ten shillings for work which should on the average take him an evening to read, and not the whole of the next morning to write. For I think that a review should never be written on the same day on which the book is read. The night brings counsel; tones down dislike to a reasonable disapproval and rash fancy to intelligent appreciation; substitutes order and grasp for chaos and want of apprehension. But this is a digres-

sion, and we must return to £ *s. d.* I am told once more that with the rapid spread and rise in numbers both of reviews and reviewers, the average payment of the latter has gone down very considerably, and that with the constant supply of workers and the apparently reduced demand for the best work as compared with quantity of work, it is likely to go down farther.

This is as it may be; and at any rate I see nothing improbable in it. For (and this is a point to which I have not yet come, and it is one on which I should be sorry to be silent) reviewing is very fascinating work, and its very fascination increases its perils of all kinds, not least those of which we have just been speaking. To a person who really loves literature and knows something of it, who has a fairly wide range of tastes beyond mere books, and takes some interest in life likewise, I know no occupation more constantly delightful. I never myself got tired of it—with a slight exception, I must admit, in the case of the lower class of novel—in the course of twenty years' unceasing practice. The words of that *locus classicus* of reviewing, the middle part of *Pendennis*: "As for Pen, he had never been so delighted in his life; his hand trembled as he cut the string of the packet and beheld within a smart new set of neat calico-bound books—novels, and travels, and poems"—remain true (except, perhaps, as to the trembling of the hand) of some of us to the last. To find such a package by your table at breakfast; to be fortunate enough (which seldom happens to reviewing man) to remember that you have got no horrid fixed engagement to spoil the fair perspective of the day; to dip into the books before you settle which you will formally read first; to select that temporary sultana; to diverge from her and look along your shelves for an older favourite which may settle some point,

or suggest a comparison, or fill up a gap in your memory; to ejaculate "What an ass the man is!" when you disagree with him; or nod approval when he puts your sentiments neatly; to find luncheon-time coming just when the books have given you an appetite for something else besides authors, and relapse upon them, not unaided by tobacco, perhaps, when you have done,—these are pleasant things and good. I do not say be it mine often so to spend my days, because change is good, and it is a mistake to reopen closed accounts. But I do say most heartily and sincerely that I have never in any kind of work enjoyed days more than such as these, and that a very large proportion of days of ostensible pleasure seem to me very dreary things in comparison.

Sometimes, too, these generally pleasing labours become something more than merely pleasing, and the reviewer, like Lockhart's Wandering Knight in his "ride from land to land," his "sail from sea to sea," finds fate more kind at last. He may, when scarcely out of his apprenticeship, open upon such a matchless stanza as—

> As a star sees the sun and falters,
> Touched to death by diviner eyes,
> As on the old gods' untended altars
> The old fire of withered worship dies.

He may a little later discover in the *Voyage of Maeldune* how half a century of constant poetical production need impair neither the poet's mastery nor even his command of new measures and methods. He may, after for years delighting in another poet's verse, see how Mr William Morris, like Sir Walter Scott, though not with like welcome from the vulgar, could close the volume of poetic romance only to open that of romance in prose. He may hear almost simultaneously the raising of two such swan-songs as the prologue to

Asolando and *Crossing the Bar*; and he may discover, as at last in *Catriona*, the only grace that had been missing to make perfect the work of the most brilliant of his younger contemporaries. These things are but a selection of the good fortunes that fell to the lot of one reviewer: and doubtless the lucky-bag is not closed for others.

I should therefore be sorry—very sorry indeed—if the occupation which has given me so much pleasure, in which I have learnt so much, which has helped me to pay, as it were, double debts, by doing a momentary duty and adding a little to more permanent stores of knowledge and habits of practice, should go out of fashion. I hope it may never cease to be one in which a man may engage without loss of self-respect, and with that feeling which, though none but prigs parade it, necessarily accompanies all honourable occupations, that one's work is of use to others as well as of honour and of decent profit to oneself. I can see no reason why any such evil day should come, even if prospects be at the moment a little downcast. There is still plenty of excellent reviewing to be found; and if it is rather more scattered than it should be, there is no reason to despair of seeing it once more concentrated. The general reviewing of England, after improving immensely between the beginning of the century and that fatal period of 1830 to 1835 which Wordsworth from another point of view celebrated in the very last effusion of his really great poetry, fell off astonishingly for some twenty years and more, and only began to improve again about the middle of the 'fifties. It has had vicissitudes since; and if it is not—I do not say that it is not—at its very best to-day, there is all the more reason for hoping that to-morrow may see it better.

That the disuse of reviewing, or its relegation to the

sort of valueless *réclame* or puff to which it has sunk in more than one country, at more than one time, to a chorus of unintelligent exaltation of our noble selves, to a jangle of inconsequent snarls, merely intended to gratify spite and the appetite for spite, or, worst of all, to a Dead Sea of colourless writing about it, and about, with little outbreaks of temper or vanity or caprice diversifying it here and there,—that any such decline and fall would be in many ways a disastrous thing, I have no doubt. It would deprive authors—and let it be remembered that the author who is at no time a reviewer, or the reviewer who is at no time an author, is an almost unknown creature—not merely of occasionally valuable censorship, but of very commonly valuable practice. It would leave literature, to a far greater extent than is commonly understood—

Helmless in middle turn of tide—

drifting about anyhow as the popular breeze chooses, without protest and without correction; and it would leave the public absolutely guideless. Reviewers, according to their unfriends, are but one-eyed guides; yet the one-eyed are kings in the kingdom of the blind, and it is inevitable that the public should be very nearly blind in the case of books, if not wholly so. It simply has not time, if it had the other necessaries, for reading everything; it wants to be told, and ought to be told, what to read, not perhaps without the addition of a few remarks how to read it. That is the function which a good review ought to perform.

Whether the review be good enough or not depends, I verily believe, more on the editor than on the reviewer, just as the triumphs of an army depend infinitely more on the general than on the soldier. A bundle of even individually good criticisms will have little weight or authority if they be simply pitchforked

together, if the principles enunciated on one page or in one week's issue be set at nought in another, if animus, mannerism, and other plagues be allowed to get the better of fair dealing and sober sanity. And it is very seldom that an editor will be able even to get such a bundle together unless he picks his men carefully, unless he keeps them as far as possible to himself by good pay and plenty of work, unless he manages to indoctrinate them with *esprit de corps*, and to get them, like other soldiers, to do what he wants and not what they want—the most absolute liberty of conscience being of course reserved. No man ever writes his best against his conscience unless he has got none at all—which is a bull, but of the nobler breed—and a man who has no conscience very seldom has much else that is worth having. And while a good editor will never wantonly or idly alter his contributor's work—while he will certainly not alter it from a childish fancy for writing everything into his own style, or adjusting everything to his own crotchet—no good editor will ever hesitate to alter, and no contributor who is worth much will ever object to seeing altered, things which do not suit the attitude or policy of the paper, which show signs of undue private grudge or excessive private favour. And, lastly, I may say that, as a general rule, a good editor will take care to allot books for review according to his own judgment, and not according to the requests of reviewers. Of course there are cases where the two coincide. But the plan which I have known to be practised, and which is, I believe, even rather common, the plan of not "sending a book out," as the technical phrase goes, till somebody asks for it, seems to me an exceedingly bad one; and that which, if not common, certainly has existed, of letting contributors come and pick and choose at their pleasure

from the review bookshelves, seems to me utterly suicidal. The allotting of a book of any consequence —there must always, of course, be a certain ruck to be left to the judgment, not of the office-boy, but of some reviewer of rather unusual trustworthiness and general knowledge—should be a matter of distinct deliberation, a deliberation from which the reviewer himself is, as a rule, better excluded, and from which, unless he is very unwise, he will certainly not resent his exclusion.

Fewer reviews; greater concentration of power and authority in those which are given; something like despotism, provided it be vigilant, intelligent, and benevolent on the part of the editor; better training in the history and methods of criticism in general literature and knowledge—this may serve as a summary of the things which may be reasonably demanded in the review of the future. As for the Reviews of the present and the past, in which I have taken a part, I think they have been not exactly perfect, perhaps in some cases rather far from perfection, but a good deal better than they have seemed to some, and bad, if bad at all, in ways rather different from those for which others have reproved them. That they have, as they most undoubtedly have, served as a staff to many stout aspirants, if also as a crutch to any useless cripples, in letters is, both as a plea and as a reproach, rather apart from the merits; but the good side of it cannot be quite ignored. That without them the public, which does not know too much of literature as it is, would know a great deal less is, I think, undeniable. And, as has been seen, I am even rash enough to think that they have in strict criticism done some good; that they have as a rule set their faces against prevalent follies and faults; that their strictures, even when harsh,

have been wholesome in particulars. I admit that the work they undertake to do is exceedingly difficult work; that it demands qualities not very often found in the workman, and perhaps qualities rarer still in his captains of industry. I think there might be improvement in these respects. But the great merit of even the worst review that retains some shred of honesty—and with others, as I have said, it is unnecessary to deal—is, that however blunderingly, however unsuccessfully, it at least upholds the principle that there is a good and a bad in literature, that mere good intentions will not make up for bad performances. In short, the review in its very nature, and inevitably, insists that Literature is an Art, and the man of letters an Artist; that to admire bad art is a disastrous and terrible thing, almost worse than the production of bad art itself; and that while to produce the good falls not to all—falls perhaps to few—to admire it, to understand it, to rejoice in it, is the portion of every one who chooses to take a very small amount of trouble, and the exceeding great reward of that trouble itself[1].

[1] I reprint this practically unaltered because I think that, like other things in this collection, it may have some use in constituting what Mr Arnold liked to call a *point de repère*. The multiplication of reviews and the tendency to substitute "butter" for "slate" has certainly increased. But if I were to complain of either I should be, as far as my personal experience goes, a curmudgeon of curmudgeons. The establishment of Chairs of English Literature at Oxford and Cambridge has both extended and intensified instruction in "Rhetoric." Some remarks on what seems to me the present state of criticism will be found by any one who cares for them in *A Scrap-Book* (London: Macmillan, 1922).

XIII

SPELLING REFORM

[*Among the bad things which, driven under cover by the great interests of the war, and the (in quite another sense) great worries of the peace, are beginning to show their noxious heads again, Spelling Reform has recently made its appearance. That it lurked for a time is not surprising: for the idea in its more modern shape came from Germany when the Huns mutilated their pretty "That" and "Thal" into the ugly "Tat" and "Tal," and was chiefly supported by actual anglicised Germans, or by philologists who had taken Germany to be their spiritual school if not home. The following paper was delivered as a lecture, not long before the war itself, to two University audiences—first at St Andrews and afterwards at Liverpool. It may amuse some readers to know that on the first occasion the enemy was so much alarmed that it sent down a special missionary to antidote my bane; whether anything similar happened at Liverpool I do not know. But as everybody does know,* fas ab hoste, *and since that enemy has come out of his den the guard against him should be mobilised. I find little to add to the original paper except that I find in the new attacks a very amusing "splurt" at those who do practise "eye-spelling" as nasty poaching creatures who play false. Also perhaps if any one says with regard to an argument at the end "Of course we do not intend to respell* past *literature" I should like to extend my compassion still more deeply and widely to posterity. With the present quite proper habit of spelling Middle English and sixteenth century, if not also seventeenth, as in the originals; eighteenth and nineteenth*

according to the established norm and twentieth (if they can get their way) in their own cacography, the task of the future reader of our literature will, as the Americans say, be "some" task indeed.]

THERE can be few people who have studied the history of this country, and who do not know that steady, unwearied, and comparatively unopposed talking will do almost anything in and with it. So it is just as well that the talking should not be all on one side and that renewed advocacy of Spelling Reform should be met with renewed opposition.

The question itself is, however, a many-sided one; and to attempt to deal with all its sides in a two or three-score minutes' paper would mean either extreme inadequacy or a bundle of scattered remarks. There are two large and important aspects of the matter on which I propose to say little or nothing—not in the least because I have nothing to say about them, but merely to narrow the issues. There is, for instance, the formidable problem which some may think lies, irremovably except by solution, on the threshold—whether, supposing the present system to be bad, and supposing that it ought to be replaced by one based on what are called phonetic principles, a workable and adequate phonetic orthography can be formed. Some people whom I respect think that it can; I must confess that I myself, after a good deal of study of the subject, think that it cannot. But I am prepared at the present moment to allow, for the sake of argument only, that such a system *might* be framed—that the election is not on this occasion to be decided by the simple absence of any properly qualified candidate to contest it with the sitting member. I should be perfectly ready to produce my own reasons for thinking that a change would

be undesirable on this ground also; but I waive them for the moment.

Secondly, I do not propose to indulge on this occasion in criticisms, numerous and often unanswerable as I think them to be, of orthographical inconsistencies or inadequacies in the system or systems which have been actually offered in exchange for our own. Glances in this direction, as in the other, may be unavoidable; but on the whole I am content to leave both as neutral ground. I may indeed seem thus to give up the most amusing if not the most effective part of the matter: for the grotesqueries of phonetic spelling are inexhaustible. But even after these immense concessions we may find something to say.

I propose to deal first, though not at any great length, with some of the reasons put forward for making a change at all. Three of the principal of these—in fact the only three, so far as I know, that have even an appearance of formidableness as being serious—are as follows:

I. The anomalies of our present spelling.

II. Its failure to correspond to true phonetic principles.

III. The difficulties which it presents to our own children first, and most of all; secondly, to older persons whose education has been neglected; lastly, as some would add, to foreigners.

Now the first objection I confess I meet with a flat demurrer, in the proper sense of that often misused word. Why shouldn't it have anomalies? And pray let me request you not to consider this as a mere flippancy, or a bit of rhetorical artifice. You will see that it has a perfectly serious and logical connection with something that I shall say at once and something

else that I shall say later. To me language, like literature, though it may be what we call a thing of art, is not in the least what we call an artificial and still less a mechanical thing. It is a thing of life, a thing of nature, a thing of history. And for my part I know nothing of nature and none of the best things of art that are not full of anomalies: though merely mechanical things may not be so. As the hackneyed saying has it you will hardly find two leaves that are exactly like each other; I will be bound that nobody ever saw (out of fiction) two pretty faces, or indeed two ugly ones, that were exactly like each other; and if everybody and everything looked the same, behaved in the same way, and so forth, existence would be as uninteresting as a quadratic equation and more so. For there *are* differences in quadratic equations. But it will be said, this is really frivolous; language is a means to an end and a product of certain processes. The means ought to achieve the end with as little trouble as possible: and the processes ought to work regularly and scientifically.

Observe that I deny all these propositions, if they are laid down without large conditions and reserves. But I will examine them as they stand and admit them at least to trial. With regard indeed to the second—the alleged incompatibility with phonetics—I am partly empowered and partly restricted by my opening limitation to say little about it. I will only say that in the first place these phonetic principles seem to me, if they are attainable, not to have been attained in any manner meeting with or deserving common consent; and, secondly, that I decline to admit any necessary connection between spoken and written words except as hereafter to be defined. Some time before the war indeed, and before the Germanisers had interned themselves, some new and very remarkable arguments were

advanced by them to the effect that we the defenders of orthodoxy "confuse spelling and language." Why that is exactly what we do *not* do, and what our Simple Simons do! *We* say that pronunciation may be a matter of language: but that spelling is a matter of literature; that the reduction of spelling to a mere phonetic diagram *does* confuse it with language in the most hopeless and mischievous way. No small part of the arguments which I have been putting and shall put before you—arguments arranged and written down in some cases long before I read this singular contention—are mainly if not wholly based on this confusion of spelling and language by Spelling Reformers. If the plans of these latter should unfortunately prevail the confusion will become incapable of disentanglement. Spelling will be language and language spelling. What will become of literature in the presence of this identification we need not at the moment enquire.

But, no doubt, the head and front of the offending of our present orthography lies in the third count—that it does not fulfil its object, that it throws obstacles in the way of understanding and indeed of learning the language itself. Let us take these objections in reverse order. As to the foreigner item I can hardly think that it is seriously urged. I pass with merely a glance the somewhat important point that a phonetic alphabet adjusted to English pronunciation would help the foreigner very little; indeed I have been told by men of real current weight—not fossil Tories like myself, but advanced and rather cosmopolitan persons—that foreigners who have learnt English by phonetic methods have a most ghastly pronunciation. But, dropping that, what a prospect presents itself! I have no objection to the foreigner. I have frequently and personally liked himself (and especially herself) very

much; I delight (when they are good) in his wines, his cigars, his literature. But when it is proposed to make such a change as this to suit him it really "does seem going far." I should never dream of asking a German to give up his belated accidence; I don't expect a Frenchman to alter his pleasing but to me unattainable intonation; or a native of either part of the Peninsula to give up that peculiar guttural, or whatever it is, which in various degrees distinguishes both Spaniards and Portuguese and which (to me again) makes those two beautiful languages so much more beautiful to read than to hear. Then why should he ask me to give up my spelling? or why should I be asked to do so by intrusive go-betweens?

As far as fact goes, I should imagine that there is, if only from a certain extremely limited point of view, more to be said for the "persons whose education has been neglected" than for any others. These have lost the adaptability of children and they will in most cases never reach the point of appreciating literature. How they come to exist after the hundreds of millions lavished on education in the last fifty years is a side issue. But, good Heavens! are we to risk what I hope to show Reformed Spelling would mean for a mere handful of people, who after all could manage the difficulties perfectly well if they chose, and if they had brains enough to make it of the slightest importance whether they managed it or not?

But now let us come to the children themselves—those precious children whose coddling appears to be a passion with the twentieth century. *Are* their sufferings so atrocious as sympathetic spelling reformers depict them? We have been recently told by these apostles that an English child requires so many, I think it is over two thousand, hours to teach him our

spelling, while a child, in Utopia or somewhere else, can learn Italian (which as you know has been largely phoneticised) in so many hundred less. Now really! I have prescribed to myself the most inviolable courtesy of language in these criticisms: and though I possess from long practice in reading and writing, especially in the public press, a large and varied store of epithets, I can hardly find one which combines politeness and accuracy in regard to this point. In the first place, how is it possible to arrive with any approach to trustworthiness at such a result? Just think of it: for the difficulties may not strike you at once. Remember the differences of ability in children; remember the same differences in teachers; remember that there are many different methods of teaching and that probably the best is as I have hinted above—no method at all. Remember too the immense difficulty if not impossibility of getting a sufficient number of experiences for averaging with the same teacher on the same child: which if not necessary would be scientifically desirable. Probably the statistics relied on are mere time-table averages in certain schools—which are simply valueless. But in dismissing them I have no intention of declining battle on the main point. *Are* (I repeat) the sufferings and difficulties of children so dreadful, and the waste of time so shocking?

I am of course an old man; you may call me a dotard if you like, and it will not in the least perturb me. But among the numerous infirmities not always amiably attributed to old age I do not know that an increased tendency to deliberate lying is one. And I do know that while one's memory as to recent events is said to be sometimes impaired, it is also usually allowed to be rather quickened as to events long distant. I can remember my early education very well: and I can

also remember disliking some things that I had to learn. But I never remember any woes at all as regards spelling. If anybody says "Perhaps you learnt it too young to remember the process" he rather gives himself away. That is just my point. A child *ought* to begin spelling and reading—nothing else I think—at about three years old. You don't give him much of it; and you teach him his alphabet not in the silly way of making "buffs" and "fuffs" and "puffs" to indicate the sound of the letter in combination ineffectually[1], but in the good old *a*, *b*, *c* style which lets him know the conventional value of the letter when he sees it. Then you *let* him read to himself as much as is safely possible; and *make* him read aloud in reasonable proportion. He will learn the sound-equivalents of these visible letter-combinations gradually, easily, painlessly. It will take him some time; but he has plenty of time. He will extend his knowledge imperceptibly but surely; and he will have laid the foundation not merely of spelling, not merely of reading, but of all education and all knowledge worth the name by finding out as much as possible for himself and having as little as possible tabloided for him.

Nor is this merely a fanciful picture or an empirical generalisation from insufficient facts. I am very certainly convinced not only that with the majority of good spellers is good spelling a question of eye rather than of ear: but I am further convinced that it ought to be so. When one speaks of eye-spelling to a spelling reformer he is apt to exclaim "Of course! with your bewildering and irrational fashion of spelling it is almost obliged to be so." But I acknowledge no hit, palpable or other, in such a retort. I repeat not only

[1] Put the simulacra of *c*, *h*, *i*, and *n* together and see how like "chin" it sounds!

that spelling in most cases is, but that in all cases it ought to be, a matter of eye and not of ear merely or mainly. So long as communication is carried on by speech only, the ear, of course, is master; though, as we shall see shortly, it finds itself even then sometimes at a loss and would continue to do so, unless something more than mere spelling is to be reformed, under the purest system of phonetics imaginable. But when language comes to be written down, the ear perforce surrenders the immediate command of the channel of communication to the eye. Except in half-educated or very slow-witted persons, I doubt whether the ear comes in at all in the process of transmission of *meaning* from the written or printed sheet of ordinary prose to the brain. Of course the ear retains large prerogatives. You cannot appreciate the beauty of a piece of poetry or prose unless you read it over with at least what may be called your "mind's ear"; perhaps not unless you actually speak it or hear it; though, as I shall hope to show presently, the eye's help is not superfluous even then and its pleasure is never to be neglected. But for mere conveyance of meaning—the original purpose remember of communication of any kind—the ear is, I think, in some if not in all cases entirely superseded. A difficult passage may sometimes call in its help as an addition: but I am sure there must be not a few here who will agree with me that one sweeps one's eye over a page of ordinary print in a fashion which neither requires nor admits any phoneticising whatever. And this "faithful eye," as Horace long ago observed in another but related matter, outstrips the "sluggish ear" hopelessly in its transmission of ideas to the mind.

In connection with this matter of eye and ear I was much amused by a remark of that most distinguished and amiable Spelling Reformer the late Principal Donald-

son of St Andrews when he took the chair at my first utterance of these blasphemies. By way of softening them he said, "You see Mr Saintsbury is a man of letters. All the philologists are on one side in this question and all the men of letters on the other." Now just please think of that. I don't say that it is true; but take it as a dictum of the enemy, though in this case a very amiable enemy. Philologists are at any rate sometimes quite respectable people. Their occupation is certainly useful, and may occasionally be necessary. But it admittedly stops short of literature, though it may be a stage towards it. Now spelling is *part* of literature, which cannot exist without some kind of it. Both may be (as Mr Matthew Arnold rather pusillanimously allowed of literature itself) "facultative," but you cannot have one without some kind of the other. And therefore I say that those who have to do with literature clearly *have* to do with spelling and ought to be heard first. This may be partisanship. But if all philologists are in favour of reformed spelling, then I say with no possible suspicion of being a partisan that they are cutting off their right hands and the ground under their feet. For phonetic spelling swamps philology; passes the sponge over the origin, the history, the kinship of words. If I were a philologist I should be as bitter a foe to it as I am now on the side of literature: and a foe bitterer still on the side of philology itself.

But I should like to make yet another diversion or strategic retreat before I tackle the main argument of this paper. Let us suppose for a moment that the spelling reformers are right about children—that the present system *does* give them unnecessary trouble; that you could get the other into their heads more quickly and easily. Should I admit this as even an advantage in itself? much more or less as worth the

disadvantages appurtenant? No; a thousand times no! They used, you know, to call old spelling-books "readamadeasies": and though the old spelling-books are regarded now as curiosities beneath contempt except *as* curiosities—things fit only for the museum—the accursed principle of "making easy" has itself made continual progress. All subjects and all methods of teaching that give real trouble—Greek, Euclid, Latin verse, the teaching of languages by grammar and dictionary work, everything of the kind—is or is to be abandoned for more subjects and more short-cuts to subjects with more go-carts and carriers and seven-leagued boots to shorten the short-cuts. "Why don't you get a cheap primer" as the honourable (Labour) gentleman asked in the House the other day—evidently believing that in the cheap primer was all anybody could want.

Now I do not hesitate to say that in education, and especially in early education, the element of difficulty is the most important and valuable of all elements. You might as well expect to mangle linen with rollers made of sponge; to break a horse by simply turning him into a pleasant field with a hayrack and a water-trough in one corner;—as to give real education by some of the methods now in use.

But if this seems to be a digression (it is not really one) let us turn directly to the reasons against the proposed reforms.

In the first place I put forward—with perfect knowledge of what I am saying and the objections to it—the Ugliness of the proposed substitutes. "Oh!" says the spelling reformer. "This is a mere delusion—a Fallacy of the Unaccustomed—the newly-formed words are strange to you and you don't like them." Once more I deny the major. I do not dislike things because

I am not accustomed to them—rather the contrary. I see daily (or as often as I am lucky enough) faces, flowers, prospects, pictures, that I never saw before and I don't think them ugly at all. I once knew a lady, very good-looking, whom I had been accustomed to see with black hair and whom after a day or two's interval I saw with golden: and I thought her very much improved. Further, I may plead with perfect modesty that I am not exactly unaccustomed to varied spellings of English. I have before my mind's eye at the present moment, in the gallery of memory, pages on pages of styles from the tenth to the twentieth century: and though I may think that some forms of some words have been prettier at one time than at another, I never did and do not now think the general form of the language ugly at any time from Caedmon to Kipling. But I have never seen a page or a passage of phonetic or "simplified" spelling which did not strike me at once as hideously and ludicrously ugly. And as in a former instance I am prepared with reason for my dislike.

Spelling—I suppose nobody will deny this even in so controversial a discussion—whether it is my spelling or that of the Simplifiers is a work of art not of nature, in the beginning at least. Kittens and primroses are not born or flowered with name-tickets on them. Now no work of art (I say it without fear of or care for contradiction) is ever beautiful when it is simply, solely and with deliberate exclusiveness devoted to an utilitarian purpose. Mind, I am saying nothing so silly as that utility and beauty are opposed or incompatible or anything of that kind. I believe it to be perfectly possible for everything useful to be made beautiful, not by plastering or disguising it with ornament but by considering utility and beauty in its manufacture.

I believe that if we were so unfortunate as to be cursed with phonetic spelling at the present time, I or any man with a sense of the beautiful, could make it beautiful even if we had lost our memory of present orthography. I know further, and it will come into our argument, that nature will take an ugly but useful work of art into her own hands and beautify it—*make* it beautiful by subtle processes and mere patience on her own part and her brother Time's. She has often done this with spelling itself. But here we have a process of art, not nature, which not only looks to the direct production of a particular useful effect on the ear, but ostentatiously and contumaciously denies appeal to the greater organ of receptivity of beauty, the eye. In what further way the eye-word is deprived of its qualities and privileges we shall see later. It is sufficient here to point to the fact (which again I defy any one to deny) that the word itself becomes a mere symbolic machine; an item of notation; perhaps an unwanted record of the real or supposed physical process by which words are produced, but nothing more —in short a piece of linguistic algebra. Of course I am prepared to believe that there are persons to whom this argument and others which I shall put forward do not appeal at all. If they hear the beauty of words (which they may or may not) they certainly do not see it. In the disputes about tinkering the Bible it is not uncommon to find people who say that they neither feel nor want to feel charms of rhythm or style. But surely it is a curious argument that the blind and the deaf should be permitted to inflict discord and ugliness on those who can hear and see. Even the dog *lay* in the manger if he couldn't eat the corn; but these dogs would defile the corn and destroy the manger at once.

I am, however, well aware that what are called

æsthetic objections are regarded by some people with contempt: and I will for the moment at least pass to something that the most Benthamite of Utilitarians cannot despise as a general consideration, whatever he may think of its particular validity. I have said that I do not on this occasion propose (much as I doubt it) to question the possibility of an adequate phonetic alphabet and a valid heterography. But this concession of abstention by no means precludes me from commenting on some consequences which would attend the most successful attempt of this kind. It is of course quite clear that no such reform can do anything whatever to remove the difficulty of the large number of words in English, not merely spelt but pronounced alike, which have different and sometimes totally unconnected meanings—still more of those which are pronounced in the same way without being spelt alike. Phonetic spelling could not of course help the innocent child or the guileless foreigner in distinguishing the various senses of "box" and "ball." It may say, quite justly, that this is out of its province. But it would not only not *de*confuse but would worse and worse confound the confusion of the visible expression of such sounds as those designating the first personal pronoun, the organ of vision, and one at least of the pronunciations of a certain form of assent. I have no doubt that many of my hearers or readers know how troublesome and sometimes actually puzzling is the practice in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries (when there was still a good deal of phonetic spelling about) of actually printing the capital "I" for the meaning "Yes."

But this, though very far from positively, is comparatively a trifle. A much more serious poser in the same line or class follows. What standard of pronunci-

ation are you going to take for your alphabet and your orthography? I do not mean to put this question with the rather sophistical sub-meaning "What *individual* is to be Adam to the new menagerie of word-beasts and give them their names?" I shall only say that I have very frequently found the pronunciation of phoneticians themselves sounding strangely in my ear: and I had a father who was a martinet on the subject. But I am not aiming at this. "What *general* standard are you going to take?" Although in consequence of the immense extension of intercommunication between different parts of the kingdom and of what is called education, the sharpest differences—the actual dialectic distinctions—have been much rubbed down, that very process has blunted as much as it has smoothed, if indeed "smoothed" is the word at all. Attempts are now quite commonly made to defend what not long ago were regarded as mere vulgarisms—the hideous "parasitic *r*" as they call it; the omission of the final *g*; and other horrors of the sort. Now as an example of the danger of attempting to fix spelling one could hardly have a better than the fact that it has actually been proposed to take this bastard, blunted, vulgarised, down-at-heel fashion of speech and make *it* the standard. I know that this appalling notion is not that of all spelling reformers, but it certainly has been put forward by some very influential ones both among the living and the dead.

And how amazing is it to find other spelling reformers actually arguing for reform on the plea that it would bring back the *music* of English! This at least and at worst would prevent the atrocity just mentioned. But what music are you going to bring us back to? And, when you have settled that,—"What right have you to prescribe a *particular music* to Englishmen for all time?"

Now I may partly apply this, and partly pass on to another stage of my argument, by pointing out that phonetic spelling necessarily stereotypes, to the utmost of its power, whatever it produces or reproduces: and makes, as in this case, a sporadic disease into an endemic and almost incurable one. There have been, as all real students of our language and literature know, large changes in pronunciation, though by no means so large as some busy theorists would make out. In particular there have been false or fanciful or inconvenient pronunciations which grew up, flourished, and passed unhindered no doubt but also unhelped and most assuredly not perpetuated by spelling itself. "Goold" and "Room" were once almost universal for "gold" and "Rome"; had they been registered in an official phonetic spelling they must have prevailed. "Tea" and "Tay" fought, as spoken words, long for titleship of the herb that does not always cheer, and sometimes does something worse than inebriate. You will find both as sounds in contemporary if not in the very same compositions of Queen Anne's time. But spelling saw fair between them and let the best win. "Yalla" (I rather doubt Yall*er* in any decent mouth) was at one time by no means a vulgarism for "Yellow": and "Chawyot" and "Hawyot" were rather choice fastidiousnesses for "chariot" and "Harriet." But they were not petrified by spelling into stalagmitic immobility: and Time and Nature put them right.

These are strong objections and I may even strengthen them later. But they lead up to the construction of a much more powerful battering-ram. "What right have you to prescribe the pronunciation of the English language to future generations?" "How dare you lay your soon-to-be dead hand on the ears and tongues, not to mention the eyes, of all time?" In the case just

referred to—the consecration or mummification of the provincialised Cockneyisms or Cockneyfied provincialisms of "board-school" diction—it would be a loathsome outrage. In any case it seems to me that it would be an unpardonable pretension to omnipotence—a thing which (as you may remember if you have rather improbably read *The Curse of Kehama*) requires omniscience to wield it. Or do you perhaps disclaim lightly or seriously, any such pretension? and explain that alterations of spelling to suit phonetic changes will be permitted from time to time? A pretty reform! The only ground on which it can possibly base itself is the provision of certainty and fixity; and that ground is self-cut from it. Who pray are to be the adjusters? We are good certainly nowadays at providing fresh government departments with comfortable salaries; and we show a docility (which must be a little astonishing to our fathers when they look up or down at us) in obeying departmental orders. But I don't envy the National Spelling Commissioners—except on quarter-days.

Let us pass again—for the list of arguments against Spelling Reform is so long that if each item were to be fully argued out a hundred lectures or papers would not suffice for deploying them. There is no more Debateable Land in the whole seat of the war than the etymological province: and we must turn to it. It has been a boast of Spelling Reformers and, I believe, a discomfort to the weak-kneed on the right side, that my regretted friend the late Professor Skeat was a spelling reformer and even defended Spelling Reform on those etymological grounds whereon he seemed to be so strong. The fact is undeniable: and there are living persons who think as he did. But when you come to look into the matter, you will find that every man Jack

of them, from Professor Skeat onwards, has been affected by one of those curious idols of the tribe, as the philosophers would say, one of those diseases of trades and professions, as the doctors would put it, which attack that odd person the expert. Just as you will find professors of Greek who would rather not have Greek taught at all than have it taught insufficiently or in what they think the wrong way, so you will find etymologists who would much rather that people kept clear of etymology altogether than that they should entertain etymological notions which seem to the expert erroneous. Now there is no doubt that our present spelling embodies a good many etymological notions or suggestions, and that some of these notions may be actually incorrect; some others doubtful; a great many (for after all etymology is a science with a good deal of guesswork in it) open to controversy; and not a few contrary to the special ideas of particular authorities on the subject. It was disagreeable to my respected friend that anyone should put a *b* in "doubt" because, though the connection with *duBitare* is induBitable, the French word *doute* had been formed without the B (though it got in there too later) and he would have liked the Middle English form d-o-u-t-e-n to be continued. I wish I had asked him whether "dout" wouldn't suggest "do out" like "doff" and "don."

This point of view—"Let us have no visible or suggested etymology at all—merely a formless and meaningless diagram of letters—rather than an incorrect one"—is perhaps noble; but I cannot take it. Let us remember that under *any* phonetic spelling-reform system etymology will go except by accident, altogether or in the majority of cases; and our words will be left as kinless loons, shivering symbols, without father or mother or inherited properties and dresses; naked

things that really might make one weep at their nakedness if it were only a little prettier form of nudity. All the rich associations of our actual vocabulary are to be pared off: and to be restored only by a precarious separate process for which only a very few persons would either have the time or take the trouble.

It is with no affectation or pretence—for no argumentative or rhetorical display—that I say that these etymological and other historical associations make one of the largest parts of the enjoyment of the linguistic side of literature to a person who really enjoys literature as such, and who has been educated in such a fashion as to enable him to gratify his tastes. They create an atmosphere round the word which phonetic spelling would utterly destroy. For instance, one of the spellings that our reformers hate most and against which they urge most vehemently the pseudo-etymological objection is the noble and splendid word "sovereign," e-i-g-n. "Intrusive g!" they cry; "horrible suggestion of 'reign' with which no connection really exists." Well: and so much more sensible the spelling which, while keeping fairly to the sound of the original word in French as transferred to English adds, by sleight of orthography, a connected suggestion which can deceive none and may please some of the best, while it beautifies the word itself and puts as it were a flower in its cap.

But, as I have hinted just now, it is not the mere etymological and linguistic atmosphere that this Reform would banish, leaving us the bare symbols for the ear to comfort or discomfort itself with. Practically speaking *all* historical interests go too or are relegated to separate studies very unlikely to be undertaken. You may almost apply to the actual form of our language Burke's gorgeous description of the tempered

and blended order and liberty which distinguish (or at one time did distinguish) the British Constitution. "It has a pedigree and illustrating ancestors. It has its bearings and its ensigns armorial; its monumental inscriptions; its records, evidences, and titles." We are asked to take in exchange for it a box of blank counters; a set of disembodied symbols; at best a clumsy mechanical gramophone which does not even present the spoken utterance of any given qualified individual. Etymology is to go; word-history is to go; the endless and curious associations of literature which have accompanied that word to its present condition and are more or less reflected therein are to go likewise. Two thousand years ago or not much less Dionysius of Halicarnassus recognised the inherent beauty of the word, and its constitution by syllables and letters. For more than two hundred years—in fact for fully three—English has carried out a practical and rational system of gradual change for the attainment and retainment of beauty. And it is all to be effaced, and a soulless algebra substituted, to suit the fancies of a few pedants; the supposed but extremely doubtful convenience of some of our stupider children and of foreigners; and *perhaps* also the desire of certain Americans to get rid of things specially British.

For, if you please, I am not going to be content with mere criticism of the proposed innovation. I maintain not indeed that the existing spelling is the best of all possible spellings—I am not Dr Pangloss or any of his tribe—but that it is a thing good enough and more than good enough *in itself* to satisfy any reasonable English-speaking person. I remember a Spelling Reformer, rather frequent in the press, who constantly twitted his opponents with being under the ferule, or the thumb, or the wing, or the something or other of

Dr Johnson. Now as a matter of fact, I myself would as lief, if I am to be under the control of anybody, be under Dr Johnson's, and a great deal liefer be under his than under that of most other people, especially German and American aliens. But Dr Johnson has very little indeed to do with the matter. We do not even always spell like him: for he spelt "critic" with a "k," and "author" with a "u" while our *general* system of spelling is a great deal older than his time. It would in fact be just as much to the point and rather truer to say that Dr Johnson generally spells like us.

The fact is that our present spelling is the result, as I partly said just now, of successive processes of revision, clarification, and the like, continued unceasingly through the most prolific part of the history of English literature and begun about the time (the second quarter of the seventeenth century) when English itself was beginning to be consciously studied as a language. In these last words I am not speaking at random or presuming on the difficulty of disproving a general statement. It was my employment during my spare time from about 1905 to 1915 to read, not in the ordinary fashion, a large number of books printed between 1625 and 1675. When I say "not in the ordinary fashion" I mean that I read them not merely for the meaning, or for the merit as literature, but also and rather particularly for the closest details of word-use and spelling of words. These books were in many cases by quite obscure authors, never reprinted in some, and presenting the widest diversity of what is contemptuously called (but not by me) "printers' spelling." In some cases, too, I believe the spelling to have been phonetic after a kind, that is to say, the manuscript had been simply read to the compositor and never "read" in the other sense afterwards, by a competent

corrector of the press. The most eccentric forms abound in them; and of course the phenomena which we should expect to find in seventeenth century books—unnecessary or ill-placed apostrophe, doubled "ll's" at the end of words, superfluous "e's" and a hundred other things of the kind—occur constantly. Yet it is perfectly common to find in them lines, sentences, passages, pages almost, in which hardly a deviation from our present spelling is to be met; while in a very large number of instances you will find, in the same book and even in the same page of it, an antiquated and a modern form of the same word. In others there is to be found, two centuries and a half ago or more, a distinct and unmistakable *trend* from older forms to that which has now prevailed. Changes of pronunciation such as those mentioned before and a vast number of others have of course occurred: but as a rule the spelling has not altered, being not under the Law of Phonetics but under the Grace of English. Changes of actual spelling have occurred, but they have never been prompted by systematic or doctrinaire considerations, and have almost if not quite always been connected with, if not caused by, considerations not of sound but of amenity to the eye, more complete naturalisation from foreign into English guise, and the like. Perhaps the most remarkable of all these changes is the disuse of the capital initial for any but proper nouns or words to which some special attention is to be called, some special position and meaning assigned.

This last, I need hardly say, is a change which has nothing to do with modern Spelling Reform proposals. Not infrequently different spellings have been adopted for the same sounding word with different meanings such as "Waist," "Waste" and "Wast"—a process which, though utterly repugnant to phonetic principles, is,

despite or because of that very fact, one of the most sensible proceedings possible. And all these changes have, once more, taken place in the gradual, cautious, half-imperceptible fashion which, as I have said, is the fashion of the beneficent changes of Nature herself. There has been no revolution of the language. We are often told that much of the wickedness of modern spelling is due to Renaissance authors and printers, who, in their blind reverence for the classics, not always coupled with very accurate classical scholarship, forced combinations of vowels and diphthongs, consonants and double consonants into the modern languages wholesale and higgledy-piggledy. There is of course a shadow of truth in this; but there is in regard to English (I do not say in regard to French) very little substance. To hear some people talk you would imagine that there was a pure, uniform, strictly phonetic orthography of Middle English: and that these fiends of printers came and muddled it with their wicked classical flourishes and anti-phonetic vagaries. This is simply false. The printers (take any half-dozen of the volumes of the Early English Text Society and see) had *no* standard of orthography for English and had to make one for their newly invented art. If something more easily accessible is wanted than the volumes at large of these most careful reproductions, look at a few pages of Skeat's larger *Chaucer* and see the variations that occur even in the selected readings from MSS.

Now when the early printers (who, let it be remembered, were almost invariably, in fact almost necessarily, men of education, letters and taste) were confronted with the task of producing, not in single copies but wholesale, something to represent anomalies like these; as well as with altered pronunciations of the words in some cases—they had, as their French con-

temporaries would have said, to "take a party"—to make up their minds to do something definite. They did it: and did it, as it seems to me, with excellent judgment on the whole; though of course not perfectly —especially at first. They called in the assistance of the ancestral or parallel words in Latin, French, etc.; they discarded some of the unnecessary doublets of letters found in Middle English but added others, phonetically unnecessary, when there seemed to be reason or attraction in doing so. The process went on rather unsystematically for the first century and a half or so; then more deliberately and slowly till now. Every now and then individuals or groups of more or less importance have adopted for themselves, and tried to impress on others, reversions to old fashions or conversions to new ones. There was Landor's extended use of "t" for "ed" in the participle which caught Tennyson and some other great ones, but has slipped out again. There was the form "diocess" for "diocese" which *The Times* held to for a long time and which I rather like myself. Sometimes *double* forms like "Marquis" and "Marquess," each of which has something to say for itself, have kept ground side by side. But on the whole changes have latterly been few and gradual; and the whole history has exhibited that steadiness and good sense which distinguish Nature as from (I will not say art but) artifice: together with the regard for beauty which comes in the same way.

"Met*re*," for instance, is a pretty form and "Met*er*" an ugly one of the same sound. If anybody as in a former case says "This is mere prejudice" let me humbly suggest to him the parallel of "Peter" and "Petre" in which no prejudice can occur, or at any rate in my case does. *Homo sum* and I know that any man might have committed St Peter's one fault. I like his way

of letter-writing very much: and I know that it is not in the least his fault if people will read into *Tu es Petrus* what is not there. On the other hand I never fell in love with any lady or made friends with any man of the noble Roman Catholic house which spells it the other way. Yet I dare, begging the pardon of an eminent ecclesiastical relative of mine, to pronounce Peter a rather ugly word and Petre a pretty one.

Therefore let us stick to "met*re*" as we do for the more beautiful meaning of the word (compare "theatre"), the alternative to which is uglier than "Peter." But we have also got from *metron* a name for a quite different thing, useful but ugly—a thing merely intended for measuring gas and water and so on. We rightly call that "Met*er*" and spell it so, though there is no appreciable difference in the pronunciation.

Thus the existing spelling unites in itself a quite extraordinary number of merits; while it has at the outside but two corresponding but unimportant defects. One is its theoretical want of correspondence to the pronunciation with which it is only in part connected: and the other its very dubious and only occasional difficulty in adapting itself to the preliminary process of education. Babes and sucklings are no doubt indispensable and so not intolerable parts of creation: while they are sometimes quite agreeable in themselves. But we do not usually, unless we are nearly idiots, upset or even quietly rearrange the entire scheme of things in deference to the supposed needs of babes and sucklings. I believe indeed—and this is the one of the points reserved above—that some spelling reformers do not "go the whole hog"; that they want phonetic reform only in the preparatory stage, and even insist that initiation in it will positively facilitate subsequent mastery of real literary orthography. This would, of

course, to some extent remove my objection (except as to a superfluity) if I believed that this process would take place in any considerable number of cases. But I think—and I have all my life been more apt to look at facts than at theories—that it is seldom if ever worth while to learn a thing only to unlearn it. The proper form of words can only be found by reading: the proper sound of them by listening to people who know how to speak them. And I would remind this sect that if, according to them, spelling is always a burden, double spelling will be a punishment for only very bad little boys indeed.

So, too, I must deal very briefly with those whom I may call occupants of a Halfway House in this matter —those who would not insist on a full phonetic substitution, but would modify the actual system in the American direction. I could say a good deal about them; but I shall content myself once more with remarking that the curse of all halfway-houses seems to rest on theirs. They have neither literary nor scientific justification: and so are hardly worth powder and shot —at any rate in so brief a campaign as this. But to the thorough-going reformers I have one more query to address, with some remarks on it to follow. Are they going to reprint all English literature in their own lovely dialect? If they are not—and I believe they do say they are not—their efforts will be all but futile and will result in a welter of conflicting variants imposing a hundred-fold burden on the poor dear children and foreigners whom they have so close at heart. If they are going to reprint, or rather to *mis*print—but one need hardly follow out that horn of the dilemma. Absurdities have a chance of triumphing for a time, but for a time only. And, lastly, if you could pay the bills, and achieve the destruction, and win the victory you

would have such a substitution of baldness for beauty, such a setting up of lifeless symbols in the place of living creatures as I myself find it difficult to characterise in seemly language. Fortunately, however, one good old phrase will do the business. No "abomination of desolation" that ever appalled or enraged the soul of a Jewish prophet could be more desolate or more abominable than the prose and the poetry of the last three hundred years grotesqued and gibberished into the cyphers of phonetics. No hamper or handicap could be imposed on new writers worse than such a change. It is idle to say that use would accustom the users to it. To the whole of the present generation in the widest sense, from dotards of seventy to decent little dears of seven, it would be as superfluous as it would be offensive. You must clear us all off before you have the field clear for Baal. And that other generation—Baal's own—would grow up to such a frightfully wasted heritage, would enjoy such miserably limited means of enjoying the past and enriching the present and the future, as surely no age of mankind —silly as the ages have sometimes been—would willingly bring upon itself.

XIV

THE PERMANENT AND THE TEMPORARY IN LITERATURE

Some months[1] ago my eye fell on some words—exactly whose I really do not know and do not greatly care—about man "lacking the courage or not realising the need to scrap old ideals as machinery is scrapped" together with a statement—quite unquestionably true—that it was some three hundred years since Shakespeare's plays were given to the world. I am not going to say anything directly or principally about Shakespeare. Scrap-heaps and he, I fancy, are still far enough asunder. But what these words, original or quoted, silly or wise, made me think of, and what I am going to talk about, is what they suggested to me—the question how far this process of scrapping is applicable to ideals in general and literary ideals in particular; whether it is applicable at all, and, if so, what are the conditions of its application. You know what scrapping means. It is decided that some piece of machinery intended for a practical purpose, such as a packet-boat, a pump or a professor, has either fulfilled that purpose too long, or has outlived the purpose for which it was intended, or has in other ways become useless and in the way. So, in accordance with the principle—the principle of "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"—you break the machine up and throw it aside. Some people, I believe, hold that scrap-iron is a particularly useful ingredient (not always fully acknowledged) in the manufacture of *new* machines; but I do not propose to follow that suggestion out.

[1] Years now (1923).

Everybody here, I should hope, is perfectly competent to do that. I only propose, as I said, to consider for a little the question what is and what is not scrappable —or what is really permanent and what is merely temporary in literary ideals and literary accomplishments. For it is quite clear that what is permanent you cannot scrap; you will only break your nails and your tools against it; in fact it may very probably scrap you. Even if you merely neglect it, the neglect will be at your risk.

About one much discussed and much disputed element of permanency I do not at present intend to say much; partly because I have, like others, said a great deal about it in other places. Hardly anybody denies that Style is an extraordinary preservative: though there are some people who seem to grudge it this power of preservation. But it is not style of which I am principally thinking. We heard something just now about "ideals." "Ideal" is a very great word; perhaps, if you think of it, the greatest word that exists —or at any rate almost a synonym of the greatest that can exist. Lower it however if you like to "idea" without the *l*—which is not quite so great: though great enough. Lower it further again to such conceptions as "subject," "temper," "fashion,"—others which denote, from various sides, the matter rather than the manner of literature. There is a familiar and inexact but very useful phrase, "What is the book about?" This excludes style: but includes almost everything else. Now my proposed subject of enquiry concerns this. When you have satisfied yourself what a book is about, can you go further, and distinguish in this the permanent from the temporary, the parts that have enabled or are likely to enable it to last for three hundred or three thousand years, and the parts

which have cast it, or are likely to cast it, on the scrap-heap or into the oven in some hundreds or thousands of days? I think you can: and it may perhaps be worth while to spend a few minutes in working out the suggestion. I am all the more tempted to do this because I have sometimes seen myself described, by persons who were good enough to occupy themselves with my humble personality, as a blasphemer of "the subject" and a rebel to "meaning." I need, I hope, hardly plead "not guilty" to such a charge: and it would be irrelevant to do more than point out that it is a very different thing to despise "subject" and "meaning" as such and to endeavour to recall, to those who think of subject and meaning only, the fact that there are other things in literature. At present I have to do almost entirely with subject and with meaning: or at least with things inextricably connected with them.

It would of course be hopeless to address any argument on the subject to the apostles of "scrapping" themselves. They are exactly in the mental condition of that famous judge, in the hey-day of the French Revolution, who after a luckless landowner had proved beyond dispute a title many centuries old observed, "If you have had it so long, Citizen, it is time that some other citizen should take his turn." The position is simple, and perhaps rather in favour just now, as applied to a considerable number of questions: but looked at with the cool eyes of logic, and the experienced ones of literature, it appears a little thin. It may be very degrading to the modern spirit to accept the lessons of history—all the more so perhaps that these very lessons teach (in their stubborn and curmudgeonly way) that the modern spirit will have to submit to them, as so many once modern spirits

have had to do before. But it is clearly to history that all unprejudiced minds must go in order to get an answer to the question, "What apparently has conduced to permanence in literature, and what to temporariness?" There is of course the possibility of further dispute as to whether what has been will be: and this, not being myself a prophet, I cannot pretend to answer except by pointing to History once more. Constantly, modern spirits have thought that "to-morrow will be a new day," that things are going to be quite different, and much better. As constantly the wiser minds among these modern spirits have found out their mistake in the one respect as in the other. But let us leave these generalities and come to individual instances and applications.

To begin with the classics. The classics are a very unfashionable subject: and I understand that there is something "undemocratic"—I believe that is the word—in knowing anything about them. But I observe that one of the arguments most frequently used in denouncing the study of Greek and Latin is that it is possible to be well acquainted with their literatures in translations. I have my own opinion on that matter. But you will at once perceive that this argument, whatever it may be good for in its own division, is no argument against our present treatment of the question. For what you can acquaint yourself with in translations of Greek and Latin is exclusively "what they are about"—their temper, their subject-matter, the ideas they convey, and the like. And we are going in the main to confine ourselves to this, not without, it would seem, a certain common field of argument (even with the enemy) as to its value.

What is it, then, that has kept these classics alive and "unscrapped" for from nearly three thousand to

more than fifteen hundred years? Their style certainly: but we have dropped that; and as a matter of fact there have been long periods in which hardly any, and few periods in which many people were great judges of pure style, or very likely to be attracted by it. Mere prescription and custom, though often urged, will not do. These are powerful things, no doubt: but historical experience, the universal master, teaches us that though these things may be "deep *almost* as life" they are not *quite* so deep: and have again and again shown themselves mortal. The secret of this life of the Classics is that the *great* Classical writers—and as to others, we have a fact from which it may be possible to draw further useful inferences presently—express life itself in its perennial aspects and qualities. The "chorus-ending in Euripides"—I don't know that I should follow Mr Browning in selecting Euripides, but the quotation is all the more to the point—expresses for us, in a way better than we can do it, what we have all thought, what we have all felt, what we have all gone through. Homer for the simpler though not always so very simple emotions and experiences; Thucydides for politics; Herodotus and Xenophon for world-travel and business; Aeschylus and Sophocles for the great poetry and tragedy; Lucretius for that passionate pessimism which is in all of us but the basest, and for that curiosity and explanation of the riddles of the earth which is in some; Sappho and Catullus for love; Aristophanes for the eternal (though it would seem not quite universal) sense of humour; Virgil for that of delicate art; Horace for worldly wisdom and polished wit; Ovid for a curious combination of romance, pure narrative interest, and knowledge of human nature—all these appeal to the perennial characteristics of humanity: and all these have made good and will make

good the human appeal to every one who will listen to them.

They contain of course much else: and upon part of this attention has (in the peculiar circumstances of their preservation and of the study of them) been quite properly concentrated, upon their pictures of manners, their allusions to the fashions of the time, their dealings with matters (religious and other) which are obsolete. But these are not the things that have kept them alive; it may rather be said that attention is directed to these because the other things have kept them alive without these. And there was, we know, an enormous mass of literature, belonging to the same periods, which has not been kept alive at all. Part of this disappearance was no doubt due to regrettable accidents; but I venture to doubt very much whether the whole can be assigned to such a cause. If it seem a begging of the question to suggest that a great, perhaps the greater part of the lost works of Greek and Latin literature dealt less with universal and perennial things than what we have, let us take an example. The ancients regarded Aristophanes and Menander as the two greatest Greek comic writers: and we happen to know that most ancient critics preferred Menander. Time seems to have been of a different opinion. We have about a dozen, in complete condition, of the half hundred dramas of Aristophanes: we have no single play of Menander complete. But we have a large collection of in some cases substantial fragments of him, and some pretty full accounts, besides the undoubted copies of Terence, so that we can make something like a fair comparison. Menander seems to have been an excellent playwright, as we count playwrights now, and would probably have made a popular novelist if he had lived to-day, and taken to that line

instead of the dramatic. He had style of a kind, a pretty hand at a certain sort of character, an excellent acquaintance with the society of his own day and with its literary and other conventions. Nor does he seem to have had any very glaring faults. But his characters, abundant and for the purpose effective as they were, seem to have been altogether of the type kind. The conditions of the New Comedy (I daresay I need hardly refer to the late Professor Churton Collins's essay on Menander here[1]) assisted in keeping him to a certain limited and conventional kind of writing: and his abundant fragments contain, with one or two doubtful exceptions, hardly a passage which goes much above an elegant commonplace. How different it is with Aristophanes! *He* has glaring faults enough: and beside them qualities which are likely not to be thought exactly merits as time goes on. He is outrageously partial and unfair in his partisanship. He is notoriously destitute of any sense of decency. His plays are usually in one or other kind of extravaganza. And worst of all, he is at first sight utterly *topical*—a sort of dramatic journalist or at best pamphleteer. And yet almost every line, certainly every page of him is alive to this day. He does not deal with types: and yet if it were not libellous, I could pair his characters with public men of the present day and of every day since his: while all difference between English and Athenian manners, religion and the rest does not prevent speech after speech of theirs, whether public or private, from corresponding to something that one has heard, or read, or thought or spoken oneself. Above all, he has managed to incorporate, as literature incorporates, one of the great perennial moods of the human mind, the mood of Scorn—the sense of the ridiculous and the con-

[1] The paper was originally read at Birmingham (1923).

temptible—after a fashion which defies the attacks of Time. Nothing is more perennial than the best satire, just as nothing, absolutely nothing, is more temporary than the lower kinds. He has isolated, in a human way, this human quality: and he and his work are safe for as long as humanity itself shall last. He has other lasting claims too—for he is a poet and a thinker, a master of style and a painter of manners that are more than temporary—and by these also he lives.

Perhaps I may be excused for taking one other classical example before I come to English—a tempting one because here we have the fullest opportunity of comparison and the eclipse is not one actually of text. When the name of Aristides is mentioned I suppose 999 out of every 1000 hearers, if they attach any idea to it at all, think of Aristides the Just, and of his ostracism, and of the useful lesson thereof and so forth. But the person of whom I am thinking was not Aristides of Athens, the statesman and general; nor Aristides of Miletus, the first recorded author of pure romance—I wish we had *him*—nor Aristides the painter, whose works sold for what would even now be a handsome price at Christie's; nor Aristides the musician, whom we do possess, but with whose work I am ashamed to say that I am not acquainted. It is Aristides of Smyrna, a Greek rhetorician of the second century after Christ whom critics, including it would seem the great Longinus, thought comparable to Demosthenes—an opinion with which, you will be surprised to hear, Aristides himself did not entirely disagree. Of his writing we possess a very considerable bulk—twice as much, I should say, speaking roughly, as we have of Demosthenes, if not more. But who reads him? I happen to have done so myself "in the way of business" as old Turnpenny observes in *Redgauntlet*: but I fear

I should not have done so otherwise. And I know scholars to whose knowledge of Greek mine is but ignorance who admit that they have hardly glanced at him. Now why is this? He writes excellently: and, what is more, in a beautiful difficult fashion which really ought to appeal to present tastes. He is a sort of Greek George Meredith both in his command of thought and language, and in the tricks which he plays with both. He knew literature well and he loved it intensely: and he is full of what we may call "modern touches," though they are not *our* modernity. But before you have wrestled with many pages of him you see at once, if you have any critical faculty, that he was *too* modern; that he was thinking of the fashions, the tastes, the "slang" (using that word in no vulgar sense, and in a wide one) of his time, of his own profession, of other things that would interest his audience, of the things that would show what a clever fellow he himself was. And he is nearly as dead as if we had not a page of him instead of three stout volumes attainable in more than one edition.

But Demosthenes? Demosthenes is not dead nor likely to die, even though courses of halfpenny newspapers and musical comedies be substituted in schools and Universities for the study of the classics. I do not know that he writes much better than Aristides: though of course he belongs to a better period of Greek. He, again, like Aristophanes, has the drawback of dealing exclusively—more exclusively even than the comic poet—with passing affairs—the politics of Athens, the law-suits of its citizens, perhaps, let us confess it, the political and professional rivalries of himself and his fellow-orators. But then, once more, he pervades these things with, and subordinates them to, the great and eternal interests of humanity—the

ideas and ideals which are never scrapped, and which save everything connected with them from scrapping. The sense of patriotism; the struggle of the Athenian state, no longer as it had been for domination, but for existence or at least independence; the mighty fighting instinct which, if it has a dram of evil in it, has hundredweights and tons of good[1]; nay even on a lower plane the intense personality and the maintenance of it against rivals and enemies:—these are no fashions, they are as ancient as they are modern, and as modern as they are ancient. You must clothe them of course in a clothing of thought and style, and Demosthenes does this:—but you must have them there to be clothed. Observe too, or the comparison would be unfair, that Aristides does deal with these very same subjects, or with subjects like them—with Miltiades, Themistocles, Pericles, Cimon. He was not their contemporary—he could not help that—but he might have treated them as Froude and Carlyle have treated Henry the Eighth and Cromwell. He does not: he is literary and modern merely, and his literature and his modernity will not save him, or rather his modernity drags down his literature. For here the secret blurts itself out. In so far as you are for an age and in so far as you are not for all time, you will die with the age that you are for and be scrapped by the Time that you are not for. And the very principle of "scrapping" implies that you should aim at being for an age and not for all time,—it implies that you cannot be for the latter do what you will.

But I must leave the classics: though it would be interesting to me to make another contrast or contrasts between Demosthenes again and his own contemporary

[1] Most of us are thinking just now, after 1918, just as they did after 1815 of the dram rather than of the cwts and tons: but the account, like all accounts, will be balanced some day (1923).

Isocrates, between Aristides again and his contemporary Lucian—like him a professional rhetorician but unlike him translated, imitated again and again in some of the greatest works of modern literature, and, by those who can, read with unabated delight to the present day. And this not merely because of his style, which disappears in translation and in imitation, not even because of his wit: but because of the way in which this wit fastens upon perennial things as well as on mere fashions. Let us come to our own special flock.

I might almost have made the body of this whole discourse concern Chaucer alone. The curious history of his reputation is well known; though perhaps it is not always well remembered. He seems to have sprung into popularity almost at once—not by any means a test of merit, and still less perhaps a test of enduring fame. But in his case this popularity was not short-lived and it did not decrease, but rather increased, for half a dozen generations after his death. It was sustained (not altogether according to knowledge no doubt) by constant imitation for the whole fifteenth century; it turned after the beginning of the next to one of those half foolish *engouements* or fashion-crazes which generally fall to the lot only of the living or (rarely) of the just dead; it was championed in most splendid fashion by his first great successor Spenser. But though it never quite died down, it was, from the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth, to some extent in abeyance: and some very foolish as well as ignorant things were said about it even by such a person as Addison. Yet in this very time it found another champion and the greatest it could have found, in Dryden—and that for the very reasons to which we shall shortly come,—while for the last century it has been reviving and almost growing from most different

points of view. The august philologer, the sensible historian and even that poor creature, the mere belletrist, alike admire it and cry it up. Now what is the meaning of this? Here is a case where "scrapping" was actually tried—where indeed it has been tried more than once—for even in modern times there have been anti-Chaucerites—and where it has conspicuously failed. Why is this? For nobody here can need to be laboriously reminded that Chaucer is rather heavily handicapped in this race for long-distance popularity. The very thing that endears him to philologists disinclines ordinary folk to him. In the same way, what makes him valuable to the historian and the antiquarian makes him hard of digestion by the layman. His style of poetry does not, it would seem, appeal to everyone who loves literature. You know that it did not appeal, or appealed only with large drawbacks, to the late Mr Matthew Arnold. Chaucer has been accused of lacking philosophy, of refusing to take the politics of his time seriously, of being alternately a scoffer and a Laodicean conformist in matters religious, of many other wicked things. And yet almost everybody who takes the exceedingly small trouble necessary to "taste" him at all tastes him vividly and rejoicingly. But this relish can be set down, in only a few cases, to the causes which no doubt enhance it in those few,—to his admirable versification; his "gold dewdrops" of phrase; his complete and almost superhuman command of the contemporary capacities of the English language. It must be something else: and what it was Dryden put —with that massive commonsense of his, and in his own nervous diction,—more than two hundred years ago, nearly three hundred after Chaucer and at the very time when Chaucer's general vogue was at its lowest and when even the panegyrist himself, for mere

want of technical knowledge, thought his favourite not "harmonious" only "rudely sweet." It was because he found him a "perpetual fountain of good sense," a "follower of nature everywhere," a provider of figures and characters which one actually sees before one. And if anybody (knowing a little but not enough) says that this is "only Boileau," I shall trouble that person to be good enough to compare what Boileau would have said of Chaucer, what he did say of Chaucer's own contemporaries and of French poets even nearer to his own time. And Dryden did not stick to these critical generalities. He went straight to the point, noting Chaucer's seizing of the various manners and humours of the English nation and transmitting them alive, "for mankind," says he, "is ever the same; and nothing is lost out of nature, though everything is altered[1]."

Now, in saying this, Dryden, as great writers and great critics generally do, says a good deal more than he seems to say or than belongs to his immediate subject. He justifies Chaucer from "scrapping" directly and triumphantly: but, indirectly, he upsets the whole principle and doctrine of the scrappers,—"Mankind is ever the same; and nothing is lost out of nature, though everything is altered."

To escape scrapping therefore, all that you have to do is to find this immutable underneath the mutations. Stick to the alterations *merely*—to the fashionable—and the business of the scrappers revives, though as a matter of fact they are almost always adherents of mere fashion themselves. Dryden had a very good example, which he perfectly well knew, but which he employed tenderly in his usual good-humoured and

[1] It is not very rare now for Science to say unhandsome things of Literature and vice versa. But Sir Oliver Lodge, who, as Vice-Chancellor, presided on the occasion when this paper was delivered, expressed the warmest admiration of this phrase of Dryden's (1923).

really scholarly fashion. Cowley, he tells us, could not "taste" Chaucer, not even—though the recommendations of persons of quality had great weight in the seventeenth century—when the poet was recommended to him by Algernon Sidney's brother, Lord Leicester. Yet Cowley's own fame, which had been of the widest, went in a generation. "It was not of God," said Rochester, "and so it could not stand," while Chaucer's had then stood for half a score and has now lasted for nearer a whole one of generations. It is true that Cowley's occultation is rather unjust: for he has something "of God" in him, inasmuch as he really is a poet though hardly a great one. But he put the temporary above the permanent, and the alteration above the abiding nature—trick of conceit, trick of Pindaric, trick of "strong" verse, as he and they called it—above the substance of strictly poetic thought and strictly poetic expression. In reading Chaucer you find yourself among a multitude of persons in strange garments, occupied as people are not occupied now, talking as they do not talk, with backgrounds—scenery—properties, etc., all unfamiliar. But the people themselves are all alive and even their speech, for all its old-fashionedness, fits the circumstances of to-day. In reading Cowley the strangeness of dress and so forth is very similar, at any rate it is hardly less. But instead of being in a moving, breathing, acting world you are in a sort of Madame Tussaud's, or even in a vast warehouse of fancy frippery like that made famous as belonging to Mr Solomon Lucas of Eatanswill. Sometimes the wax figures or the empty clothes stir a little, however old-fashioned: occasionally the thin chirping ghostly voices become lively, and then things are better. But on the whole it is at best a museum, at worst a frippery-shop. It is lucky if you have anti-

quarian and technical interest enough of this or that kind to spend an hour in it not unpleasantly.

And this we shall find the key of the whole problem, the fact that "nothing is lost in nature" though everything alters in appearance: and that *if* you can get hold of that which is not lost, you are safe from scrappers, whom you will occasionally see scrapped in their turn. The fault of the neo-classical critics whose language Dryden used, though he parted from them in reality, was that, quite properly recognising this general fact, they limited their "nature," their "good sense" and the like, arbitrarily and irrationally. For instance let us go from Chaucer to Spenser. Spenser, you know, has been repeatedly charged—has indeed of late been charged quite often—with not adhering to nature and with being merely fanciful and romantic. Yet he has had, if not so large a following as Chaucer, a continuous one and one of no slight consequence for the more than three hundred years that have passed since his death. And why? In part for his extraordinary artistic beauty, no doubt: that being, as has been admitted, a passport to eternity, but not the particular one of which we are mainly speaking to-day. It is too often forgotten that the things with which Spenser is reproached—his dreaminess, his romance, his "other-worldliness" in a peculiar sense, are just as actual parts of the unchanging human mind as any others. They may be present in fewer people, they may be in less or more evidence at this or that time, they may not exist at all or exist only fitfully in this or that man: but they are part of mankind all the same and, as such, unscrappable. Spenser has got fast hold of them—of much else too that is permanent but certainly of them: and permanence passes from them into him and into his fame. I have the highest respect

for my friend His Excellency M. Jusserand, who is not only technically excellent as an Ambassador but really so in the most difficult art of appreciation of a foreign literature. But I will back Spenser's quality against his strictures for many a generation to come.

I have said that I do not intend to deal much with Shakespeare. He is indeed almost too ready-made an instance of the truth which I am endeavouring, unnecessarily perhaps, to establish or at least to illustrate. On the one hand, the famous saying—"he was not of an age but for all time" asserts it specifically; on the other, the equally famous phrases of the "largeness and universality" of his soul go straight to our mark. But two things there are which may be remarked. The one is that though Shakespeare's fame, as has often been demonstrated, has practically never been eclipsed or occulted, there have also never been wanting efforts to "scrap" him—from the early attempts to make him out a plagiarist, an ignoramus or a mere player, through the Puritan iconoclasm by which even Milton allowed himself to be tainted, through the travestying and vulgarising of the Restoration and the demonstrations by the Rymers and the Voltaires and others, of his extreme and lamentable imperfections, down to the well-known theories of to-day which do not indeed attempt to scrap the work, but the man—and to direct attacks on the work itself from the most different points of view,—ultra-Catholic, ultra-socialist, ultra-farcical, ultra- in every quality but commonsense and the sense of poetry.

Still there is a point of some curiosity in the comparison of Shakespeare himself with his contemporaries. Of those contemporaries, even down to the minors and minims among them, I may profess myself a diligent reader and a humble admirer. But I am the very first

to admit that there is a mighty difference between them and him and to base that difference on the very contrast which we have been discussing here. I know that there are some persons (perhaps the majority) who do not agree with me when I say that Shakespeare seems to me to be almost as consciously not of his age as he is, consciously and unconsciously, for all time. For my own part I learn very little from the *Plays* about the age of Elizabeth—even about its special temper and character, much more about its manners, habits, fashions and other alterable things. It cannot, I think, be a mere accident that Shakespeare never takes a contemporary subject: it most certainly is not an accident that his not having done so has freed him from one danger, or set of dangers, which his contemporaries, and still more his followers, have incurred, and which has been almost fatal to some of them.

For they, or at least nearly all of them, were by no means indifferent to the maxim "Be up-to-date" whether they would have formulated it thus or not. From Ben Jonson downwards they might almost seem to have had definitely before them the commands (not unknown at any time but particularly rife for the last century) to let the dead bury their dead in literature, to "look alive," to be "modern" and the like. You will find more information about things and thoughts, matters and manners Elizabethan in any one of half a dozen plays of Ben Jonson's or any one of a dozen and more of Middleton's, than you will in the entire theatre of Shakespeare from *The Tempest* to *Pericles*. I do not know that you will find a single play of theirs (except perhaps Jonson's exquisite fragment of the *Sad Shepherd* and those classical plays of his which are a kind of cento from the classics) which is not, whatever its subject, saturated with what then was

modernity. But Jonson also scattered everywhere a great deal that was not modern—a great deal that was perennial: and he has been saved, partially, by this. Middleton, who was not, I think, much inferior in genius to any of his fellows, who could write the magnificent De Flores and Beatrix-Joanna scenes of *The Changeling* and the fine "problem-play" as we should call it now of *Women beware Women*, and the delightful romantic-comic medley of *The Spanish Gipsy*, Middleton has been dragged down by his temporary modernity with its need of transposition and explanation and allowance. Who, except those harmless drudges, literary historians, really knows of most of the others, even Webster and Dekker, even Beaumont and Fletcher themselves (who do however generalise and disrealise more than most), anything but the stock passages recovered by Lamb and others—most of them, if not all, possessing nothing specially Elizabethan but the kind of the poetry, and no ideals but what have been the ideals of humanity at all times of which literature gives example or history record? Of course these and other apparent connections between the modern and the perishable, the non-modern and the permanent, may be merely delusive coincidences, not real instances of causation. But they have at least a pestilent habit of continually re-presenting themselves.

I cannot follow them up here even in the rapid and merely representative fashion in which I have dealt with some of the greatest names of our literature up to this point. The handling of the remainder of this paper must be more scattered and cursory. The kinds of literature which seem to be most exposed to this scrapping influence of modernity when it ceases to be modern are certainly the drama and the novel—for obvious reasons. In no division except pure journalism,

is the immediate appeal to popular taste by ephemeral touches more tempting or more likely to be immediately successful: in none is it more surely punished in being thrust out on the scrap-heap by its own kind later. In the days which, when everybody played or sang, "an old song" was the usual term for something utterly effete and done for: "An old novel" has, with some people at least, taken its place—though there is a pleasant touch of satire in the fact that if you reprint an old novel so that it looks new, people will sometimes read it. But a really "old novel"—that is to say, one of which the atmosphere and manners are thoroughly out of date without being exalted by positive genius out of consideration of date at all—*is* terribly hard reading. I can read almost anything: and partly from taste, partly in that way of business of which I have spoken, I have read a very large number of old novels, often, I am bound to confess, with much more satisfaction than that which new ones generally give me. But I have always found that when a novel has dealt with the special fashions, the special problems, the special fancies of a day that is long enough ago for these to have ceased to be actual, it becomes all but unreadable save for some special gift of style. Even what we commonly call a convention (it was the saving of eighteenth century literature) is better than a fashion: because a convention has almost necessarily something of the ideal—if only of the pseudo-ideal—about it and a fashion has none. Satire of fashion may do because satire is itself perennial: exposition of fashion in religion and politics, of fashion in manners, in morals, in thought even—will not do at all. I cannot (though I have used it elsewhere before now) refrain from the striking example of this furnished in the special branch of the subject by Theodore Hook. Hook

was a man of talent almost approaching genius, and perhaps amounting to a minor kind of it. He knew the society, the politics, the tastes of his day and date almost perfectly. He did a good deal, though he stopped short of the best, in restoring the novel to its estate in real life which it had lost by the extravagance of the Terror school, of the Sentimentalists, and others. Both Dickens and Thackeray owed him not a little of what might be called profanely their start and stock in business. He had plenty of wit; a sense of situation; fertility in a certain kind of character. Yet I scarcely know a harder writer to read through: precisely because of his antiquated modernity.

The law holds less in poetry, though it holds there also—because the very essence of poetry that *is* poetry is eternal and unchangeable. There is extraordinarily little difference in spirit, or even in real form, between a chorus of *Prometheus Bound* and a chorus of *Prometheus Unbound*, between a specimen piece of Sappho and one of Mr Swinburne. But short of the highest and most persistent styles and subjects, fashion still exercises its baleful and corrupting influence. The allegory of the fifteenth century; the metaphysicalism of the seventeenth; the artificial conventions of the eighteenth—we are too near as yet to go farther—all have shown this. Allegory, though it is not popular just now, I dare swear to be in itself an admirable and respectable thing, if anybody can make it so as, fortunately, not a few people have made it. I will fight for metaphysicalism at its best at any time: even though it has revived in a different form nowadays and I don't love that form at all. The person who cannot taste the poetry of the "teacup times of hood and hoop, and when the patch was worn" is only to be slightly less commiserated than is he who cannot taste Chaucer.

But in all these cases the things lent themselves too much to fashion: and fashion, if it did not kill them (for poetry cannot die) made them appear diseased and wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked to other times, precisely because they had seemed to be rich and to be beautiful and to have need of nothing to the generation that produced them. Once again the modern is the enemy of the perennial.

But do I mean to suggest that you can secure permanence by merely *not* being modern—by setting your face against modernity and imitating some particular period of the past? I am not, I hope, quite so foolish. In the first place, the thing has been tried and failed. The less wise spirits of the Renaissance thought that they could do this by absolutely slavish imitation of and downright stealing from Cicero and Virgil. The whole Neo-classic period of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries did the same thing in a rather less extravagant way. The weaker vessels of the earlier romantic period did it with things mediæval. And they all failed: and could not but fail. You can no more put back the hands of this clock than you can hurry them forward or keep them at a standstill. Besides, to set yourself deliberately against modernity is to undergo the basest kind of slavery to it, and to bind yourself to "follow it in the other direction." But you may decline to follow it in its own direction unless the direction coincides with what has been proved a safe one before: and you may be specially wary of following it in a headlong wholesale, and undiscriminating manner.

For, if you think for a moment, you will see that suspicion of modernity is not based on any prejudice or superstition but on very simple and irrefragable logical considerations. The advantage of even any given

period of the Past—still more of the whole Past over the Present—is a rational and demonstrable one—especially demonstrable as it touches literature. It may or may not have been better or worse *when* it was a Present itself: we know in looking back, that the literary values of different ages have varied curiously and, as it seems to some sober observers, almost unaccountably. But what was good and what was bad in it, what was temporary and what was permanent, have been separated, riddled, precipitated, whatever metaphor you choose, from each other by Time itself. In the Present this has not been done. The critic, by natural and cultivated gift, can do it to some extent: but the less he is of a charlatan the more frankly will he confess that he cannot do it wholly.

Therefore it behoves every age, and every individual in an age, to be extremely distrustful of anything that is not proven. Some years ago—not many—there was a German Professor who gloried in "the God-given power vouchsafed to us Germans before all other nations, by the grace of which we are enabled to recognise true genius of whatever nation better than other nations." On the very day on which I wrote these words I had just seen in an English newspaper the statement—less ludicrously and childishly Philistine in form but equally deluded and delusive—that "it is the glory of our modern age to excel all others in intellectual receptivity." Alas! alas! the humour of this kind of thing is great, but the pity of it is perhaps greater. When an individual, or a country, or an age gets into this state of mind one knows what is before it and him; and I am sure it must be unnecessary to point out at any length how much the tendency to this absurdly self-sufficient attitude is likely to be increased by a too great faith in the doctrine of scrapping.

Do I then,—once more but in a different way—wish successive ages to fold their hands, or only open them to take what has already been given, to acquiesce in La Bruyère's saying that "All has been said" and so to enter upon and abide in that "stationary state" which, we are told, is a thoroughly unhealthy one? Again, by no means. The very historical argument which I have been using would at once prove any such wish or advice to be absurd: for its adoption would have prevented the coming into existence of the very ideals and examples of which I have been maintaining the permanency and the value. You can never know whether something apparently new will be an "alteration," to use Dryden's word, of the everlasting sameness—an alteration of a valuable kind—till you try it by the tests and touchstones of the old: but you ought never to reject it until these tests and touchstones have been duly applied and have failed to validate the presence of the right qualities in it. By this process, and this only, can you distinguish the crank from the sage, the quack from the true man, the rubbish from the sterling matter, the permanent from the temporary.

It is true that some fashions, even of the most purely fashionable kind, have nothing in themselves objectionable, and deserve to be kept in a kind of museum if not granted long life and immortality with the unscrappable ideals and the eternal results of art. But this itself must be determined by the judgment not of the age, not of the next age, but of a series of ages.

On the whole, therefore, this truth as regards literature no less than as regards other things but perhaps much more, is that the fact of a thing being of this century or of that—being up to date or not—has absolutely nothing to do with its intrinsic goodness,

and possesses only a subordinate and comparatively vulgar value of any kind. How much of the eternal has it in it? is the question: and that question you can only answer by looking back on the past and comparing. There is revolution as well as evolution in that past: and you may sometimes come upon things apparently long-lived and apparently contradictory. But the appearance is deceitful: they are not contradictory but complementary. There is no real contradiction, for instance, between "Classical" and "Romantic" except as regards an excessive partisanship of them: they are the gold and silver sides of the shield of all great literature; they represent eternal things in human nature, of which one comes uppermost at one time and in one person, the other at and in another. But always these admirable words of Dryden will apply and be true: and always will they be the motto of every sound critic and every accomplished lover of literature. "Mankind is ever the same; and nothing is lost out of nature, though everything is altered." For what is true of mankind is true of mankind's works: and should be truest of the noblest of those works, Art—and of the noblest of the Arts, Literature.

XV

BOLSHEVISM IN ITS CRADLE

THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF WILLIAM GODWIN

It cannot be quite alien from the objects and subjects of *The New World* to cast a glance on the prophet of what was once proudly or shrinkingly called "The New Philosophy"; more particularly when this old-new doctrine, or set of doctrines, has recently become new again with a vengeance. What makes the subject more interesting still is that, as so often happens, Godwin was very much forgotten, at least in England, but a very short time ago, comparatively speaking. His novels, indeed (with which it is not proposed to deal here, though *Caleb Williams* is a sort of companion in fiction to *Political Justice*), kept him in a certain remembrance, for the book just mentioned never went out of print; and some people read *St Leon*, though not many ventured on *Fleetwood*, fewer still on *Mandeville*, and fewest of all on *Cloudesley*. But of those who had any notion of *Political Justice* itself, some (probably most) got that notion from a characteristic passage of De Quincey (whereon more presently), and two persons of very high repute in English academics and letters during the latter part of the nineteenth century expressed themselves pretty contemptuously about its author. Mr Jowett, most famous of all masters of Balliol since Wyclif, is said, if I recollect aright, to have objected to someone reading Godwin's *Political Justice* because it was merely second-rate stuff, and obsolete besides; and Mr Matthew Arnold, who did not by any means always agree with

Mr Jowett, was much more explicit while delivering the same opinion in a passage of a letter to a French friend of his. This French friend, it would seem, was anxious to find some good subject in English literature for an essay, and had thought of Godwin. Mr Arnold objected. "Godwin," he says, "is interesting, but he is not a 'source'—an origin." "Of the actual currents which are bearing us along, none comes from him." There was at the time he wrote—it was 1876—the Life of Norman Macleod, there was the Life of Lord Macaulay, there were many good subjects on all sides. "You would be wrong," he says to M. Fontanes, "to leave them on one side and write an article on Godwin."

Here are two weighty authorities to go against, and yet somehow I do not feel, and what is more never did feel, much abashed by them. Mr Jowett, very free from prejudices in some respects, had plenty of them in others, and was rather notorious for regarding not merely what he did not know, but what he did not care to know, as "not knowledge." He had grown up at a time when Godwin's anarchism had gone out of fashion and had not come into it again; the man, no exact scholar and a Bohemian in the outskirts of literature, was not likely to appeal to him; and so Godwin was dismissed. Mr Arnold's disapproval is even more easily intelligible. Expert and leader as he was in literary criticism, exquisite as his accomplishments were in literary practice both of verse and prose, Mr Arnold was not a great proficient in, and a rather lukewarm admirer of, literary or any history. He thought that the historic estimate tended to make people pay too much attention to things other than the great and principal things to which he would have had us solely devote ourselves; and certainly none would say that Godwin's work was one of these. But

see how history revenges herself. Mr Arnold here made a distinct blunder in fact. Godwin, if not the author, was in England the first clear and thorough-going codifier of those anarchist doctrines in politics and philosophy which were not quite unknown or unimportant things in his own day, and have grown into the greatest portent of our present period. In letters Godwin exercised the very strongest influence for a time on the two men, Wordsworth and Coleridge, who a hundred and twenty years ago revolutionised English poetry and almost English literature. That, too, is something of a claim to be a source—something of a title to be an origin: and the two together may perhaps make him at least as good a subject as Dr Norman Macleod.

Godwin, whose very name shows his essentially English blood, was born on 3rd March, 1756, at Wisbech in Cambridgeshire, but came of a family which seems to have been established in Wessex, at Newbury, for some generations at any rate. His father was a Nonconformist minister, and a pupil of the famous Dr Doddridge; he was educated himself for the same vocation, and actually for a time pursued it, first at Ware, then at Stowmarket. And though his orthodoxy gradually gave way, he does not seem to have made any kind of violent severance between himself and his co-religionists, but rather to have slipped almost insensibly out of ministerial and into literary work. Of his performances in his new function very scanty and indistinct accounts exist for some time. He wrote, before his success with *Caleb Williams*, at least three novels (which nobody seems to have read, and which I myself never came across) for ridiculous sums of money—ten or twelve pounds apiece. He contributed to reviews at the starvation prices—two guineas the sheet of sixteen

pages or thereabouts—which were customary till Jeffrey and the *Edinburgh Review* gave a dead-lift in this matter to the extent of from five hundred to a thousand per cent. He once had, for a time, poorly paid but regular employment on an extremely useful publication, the *Biographia Britannica*. He even appears by degrees to have attained, in a way more common in the eighteenth century than since, a position in London literary society rather justified by his abilities than by his performances, and certainly not due either to wealth or to powerful connections in blood or friendship, or to party subserviency. For Godwin, though in some ways, as we shall see, not exactly a high-minded man, had an unconquerable scrupulosity in adherence to his own opinions, and would have been quite unable, even if he had been willing, to write to order on any subject or in any prescribed line of policy or creed whatsoever.

He was very nearly forty when his two famous books, different in outward character but due to very much the same inward purpose, at once made him a personage of distinction in literature and of formidable importance in politics, and gave him an influence the character and amount of which, though for a long time pooh-poohed or ignored, are absolutely undeniable by any one who has studied the subject. These books were the—in more than one sense—great treatise on *Political Justice* and the novel of *Caleb Williams*. The ideas of both were no doubt partly inspired by his friend Holcroft, a self-educated man of crude and violent opinions, but a dramatist and novelist of real talent. Holcroft, however, had neither the education nor the systematic temperament necessary to work out such a treatise as the *Political Justice*. For the book is the most remarkable example extant in its own

direction of what has been called the intellect left to itself, and working out consequences from certain assumed principles, without regard to experience, or expediency, or humour, or common sense. Appearing, as it did, just at the time when the practical excesses of the French Revolution had reached their highest, *Political Justice* arranged the Anarchist theory—the theory which regards all positive law, all regular institutions, all punishments, all interferences, in short, of any kind with the individual except in the way of kindness, as things utterly unjustifiable and radically bad. The antithesis between Justice and Law is at the very root of this book, and is not much less at the root of *Caleb Williams*.

Marriage, religion, monarchy, being all restraints, have to go; though Godwin is so preternaturally serious and thorough-going that he deprecates the use of force to overthrow institutions quite as strongly as the use of force to maintain them. It was possibly this, and the obvious want of practicalness in his doctrines generally, that saved him from the prosecution which was unsuccessfully directed against his friends Holcroft and Horne Tooke, and more successfully against others. Such a prosecution must almost certainly have succeeded in his own case, either in England, or still more in Scotland, where one can imagine Lord Hermiston finding Godwin a subject equally congenial to his own taste, and inspiring to the pen that, alas! dropped from the hands of his future biographer. Godwin's adversaries, however, who included Canning and other persons plentifully provided with the humour which he as plentifully lacked, declared that *Political Justice* was not prosecuted because a book published in quarto at three guineas could do the general public no harm. There is truth as well as humour in this gibe. The book

—my own copy of which, probably in consequence of the odium attaching to it, was bound with no title on the back—formed a huge volume of the size of a large family Bible, printed with margins which, though cut down in binding, are still of the most lavish, containing with Preface and Contents more than nine hundred pages; and, though very well and clearly written, conducting its demonstrations with a relentless and stolid contempt of all sense of the ridiculous on the one hand, and on the other of those appeals by rhetoric to passion, which are most formidable when addressed to popular audiences. Its effect on the unthinking was probably next to *nil*; its fallacies were seen at once by steady heads; but its influence on young and enthusiastic persons of more wits than experience was incalculable. This has been described in the above-mentioned passage of De Quincey's, which, though a little, is not much exaggerated in tone, and which, though the writer was too young to have known the facts actually at the time of the book's appearance, represents very recent tradition and a direct acquaintance with some of Godwin's most illustrious if most temporary converts, such as Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. He speaks of the shock to Society as being, though momentary, fearful—of men being appalled by the cold fury of the challenge.

Perhaps one ought to qualify this rather strong language by showing something of the other side, of the grave and grotesque absurdity which saturates Godwin's anarchism. Despite or through the varnish of amiability above-mentioned, there are germs of the worst results of Bolshevism itself. But we may find something equally amusing and suggestive in his serious proposition that "All attachments to individuals, *except in proportion to their merits*, are plainly unjust."

One sees at once how extremely convenient this is, or would be, on one slight supposition—that human beings were not human beings. Attachment being a mere calculus of merits, envy, jealousy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness would vanish at once. If my friend dropped me for another friend I should philosophically observe that the other friend's merits were no doubt superior to mine. If my wife left me in the same way, or if any young lady refused to be my wife, the same reflection would at once remove all soreness of feeling. If my father cut me off with a shilling —though indeed on Godwin's system there would be no shillings and no cutting off, with very dubious fatherhood—I should either acknowledge the paternal acuteness in perceiving my want of merit, or deplore the blindness in miscalculating my possession of it. Perhaps the following passage, which has to do with community of goods, is even funnier. Godwin was a student; and it seems to have occurred even to him that it would be rather a nuisance if another person came into his room and said: "Philosopher, I want this room to sit in and that table to work at." But his undoubting mind was never staggered long by any commonsense consideration. "Disputes," he says—and I am now quoting his very words—"would in reality be impossible. They are the offspring of a misshapen and disproportionate love of ourselves. Do you want my table? Make one for yourself; or, if I be more skilful in that respect than you, I will make one for you. Do you want it immediately? Let us compare the urgency of my wants and yours, and let justice decide." That an abstraction *can't* decide: that each disputant will be quite certain beforehand that she decides for him; and that the upshot of it will be either resort to brute force (which Godwin hated) or to that embodied

Justice, to wit Law, which he perhaps hated less, but which his system compelled him to declare to be worse; that if you are perpetually to interrupt business and pleasure to discuss and compare respective claims to their implements life cannot go on for a day—these are the things which the plain man sees at once, but to which Godwin shut his eyes with that sublime, that inexpugnable, that utterly hopeless and desperately mischievous persistence which only implicit faith in theory can confer upon mankind. When a man decides, as Godwin does, that exactly half an hour's work per diem on the part of everybody will satisfy all the reasonable wants of the human race, he is beyond argument: you can only laugh at him or shut him up.

Caleb Williams—still a common enough book, not merely in libraries but in modern bookshops, ever willing to book orders—is a sort of fictitious illustration or object-lesson in the doctrines of the more abstract treatise. The hero by chance discovers the fact of a murder having been committed (under circumstances, it is true, of gross provocation) by a man of high reputation and otherwise unblemished character, and the whole story of the book, which is very ingeniously constructed, turns upon the efforts of the criminal to suppress the danger of a revelation. Even here the indictment against society is of the most unpractical kind, and Godwin is apparently blind to the obvious retort that in his own ideal commonwealth private murder would probably be one of the most frequent of things, inasmuch as on the one hand there would be no other hope of redressing an injury, and on the other there would, on the strictest system of *Political Justice*, be no fear of punishment.

This point is of importance. It will be observed, and may be objected, that this "Bolshevism in its Cradle"

lacks a good many things which are associated with the same creed, or no-creed, at the present day. There are no Soviets; there is no *special* anti-Capitalism; there is no *special* worship of the proletariat; and there *is* a special putting forward of sweet reasonableness and absence of violent methods. But then most of us in our cradles do differ considerably from our grown-up stages: even Lord Palmerston, who thought we were all "born good," certainly did not think that we all remained good. And while Godwinism was practically certain to develop all the corruptions of its maturity, that development would be as certain in some cases by reaction as in others by development proper. If Godwin did not say in so many words, "*La propriété c'est le vol*," his own theory of temporary and readjustable property according to merit must (human nature being what human nature is) turn into Proudhon's; and it only wanted time and the Marxian miasma to spread the notion that capital is the worst form of property. So, also, though Soviet authority must logically share the curse of *all* authority according to the pure Godwinian anarchism, something of the kind was sure to arise. As for the transformation of mild persuasion into murder, that is the most inevitable of all. "Be my brother or I will kill you" is not a joke, but a simple expression of natural human sentiment, observable and verifiable in all fanatics—religious, political, social, teetotal and every other kind. Once remove government according to law as found necessary and imposed by traditional experience of human history, and all these things follow, with the agreeable further developments in detail of Moscow and Munich, as a matter of course. And this removal is certainly the be-all, though in two senses, good and bad, it cannot be pronounced the end-all, of Godwin's New

Philosophy. On the abstract characteristics of that no more need be said; but something remains to be said in regard to his later life. It was in some ways curiously inconsistent with his opinions; but it never was false to his doctrine of what was due to merit—which in his own case he naturally presumed to be high.

The period—the eventful years 1793–4—which saw Godwin shoot up from his long-occupied position of a respectable hack of letters to that of a dreaded or revered political philosopher and a popular novelist, also begins, again late, his history as a personally interesting hero of another kind of romance. If he was such a hero, it was to a great extent in his own despite. He was all his life an exceedingly cold-blooded person, though his admirers will have it that he was passionately in love with his first wife, the famous and luckless Mary Wollstonecraft. But either because of this very insensibility, or because of his fame, he seems to have been rather an object of admiration to the other sex; and though he had the unpleasant experience of being more than once rejected as a suitor, and at least once cast off as a friend, by ladies, it seems to have been due, in all cases, mainly to his extraordinary inability to conduct himself like a man of this world. Before he met Mary Wollstonecraft he was on terms of intimate and honourable friendship with the beautiful and bewitching actress and dramatist, Mrs Inchbald, who found *Caleb Williams* "sublimely horrible, captivatingly frightful," and whose breach with him on his marriage was pretty certainly due to pique. He had also, it would seem, aroused, though no doubt most innocently, the jealousy of a Mr Reveley, the husband of a very pretty lady who is well known to readers of Godwin's future son-in-law as a friend of the Shelleys, though under the name of Gisborne, which she took

by a second marriage. But when he met the author of the *Rights of Woman* he seems to have succumbed to her almost at once.

She was not very young; and she had had no pleasant experience of the male sex, in a spendthrift father, an unkind brother, and a lover who behaved as badly as any lover possibly could behave. Her portraits show her to have been, though not regularly beautiful as Mrs Inchbald was, yet of very attractive appearance, and her charm is attested by every impartial person who knew her, and by some on the opposite side to her in politics. The insubordinate character of her principal book, however, with her unhappy history, and, it must be admitted, some crudities and vulgarities of expression which seem to have been due to an unfortunate bringing-up rather than to any want of real delicacy of mind, had prejudiced the general opinion very much against her: and it was only in distinctly Jacobin, or, to antedate a useful word, distinctly Bohemian, circles in London that she could hope to be welcomed without awkward limitations. The really comic thing was that, according to a very common but always amusing law of humanity, she and Godwin, both of whom testified against marriage, lost no time in getting married. Their married life was short, not unhappy, though it might have become so, but at least as unconventional as could be expected from the prophet of the New Philosophy of General Anarchism and the prophetess of the *Rights of Woman*. Although they did not exactly keep entirely separate establishments, Godwin had separate lodgings in which he spent sometimes the whole, sometimes part of the day; and they wrote notes to each other asking for "a call" if they had occasion to confer with each other. An exchange of letters during a tour which he took in the

country not long after the marriage is sufficiently lover-like, but not least so in containing some lovers' quarrels on the lady's side. But perhaps it is rather difficult to expect continued happiness in the case of a passionate and excitable woman like Mary Wollstonecraft, and a man like Godwin, the eccentricity of whose opinions was only equalled by the extraordinary phlegm of his temperament. It is, however, certain in the first place that his two chief women friends, Mrs Inchbald and Mrs Reveley, were, the one irretrievably, the other temporarily, estranged by the marriage; and in the second place that Godwin very bitterly lamented the loss of his wife, which followed shortly after the birth of the future Mrs Shelley. It is, according to established opinion, no argument against the sincerity of this lamenting that he very speedily resolved to marry again, though the resolve emphasises the comment on his previously expressed opinions upon marriage still more tragi-comically. "Marriage, that institution which I wish to see abolished," says he, "and which I would recommend to my fellow-men never to practise but with the greatest caution." As we shall see, if he did not in the second instance practise it with caution, it was not for want of repeated trials; and the caution was rather on the other side.

In a remarkable collection of Essays published in the year of his marriage (1797) and called *The Enquirer*, Godwin did not so much recant or draw back from any of his previously announced opinions as vary and extend his method of enquiry into other and sometimes, though not always, less dangerous districts of discussion. The preface, however, contains, though no recantation, a distinct apology for the previous effervescence of his zeal, confesses that he "did not escape the contagion of exaltation and ferment," and avows his old plan of

starting with one or two simple principles and deducing fearlessly without any regard to consequences; accompanying the avowal with a further confession of its extreme danger, and acknowledging that he has substituted the recurrence to experiment and actual observation. Accordingly *The Enquirer* has nothing of the interest of startling and scandalous novelty which belongs, or at least belonged, to *Political Justice*. To those who only want excitement it is rather a humdrum book; though Godwin's invincible insensibility to those considerations, now of prudence, now of absurdity, now of other restraints, which beset ordinary minds, gives it piquancy now and then. It was quite clear, however, that in such paths no literary fortune was to be won; and Godwin turned to drama (the unlucky *Antonio* of the damnation of which Lamb has given a delightful account); the later novels above referred to, and other things. But these are not for us to-day.

We may return to the personal interest of Godwin's life, which now grew acute again. He had, as I have said, discovered that whether it was desirable or not that mankind should "practise marriage with caution," there is a good deal to be said for the practice in itself. And with two girl children of tender years to be taken care of (his own, and Mary's by her lover Imlay), there would have been much excuse for him even if he had had no other reason for returning to the said practice. Unluckily that incurable incapacity for behaving like a man of this world which has been noticed, and which is so closely connected with his opinions, rather increased upon him. His friend, Mr Reveley, died in July, 1799; and before a month was out Godwin proposed to the widow. We have not got Mrs Reveley's answers to his letters; but we have the letters them-

selves, or some of them, and they are quite enough. He storms at "cowardly ceremonies"; his confession, or practical confession, in the Preface to *The Enquirer* that there was a good deal more in cowardly ceremonies than he had once thought, having apparently been forgotten under the pressure of personal disappointment. He tells the lady, with his customary maladroitness, that she said she loved him when she had a husband, and therefore she ought to marry him now that she has none. She seems to have told him that she was afraid of his superior understanding; whereupon instead of protesting, as any lover with a grain of intelligence would have done, that she was much the cleverer of the two, he admits the soft impeachment, says that she ought to like him all the better, and tells her that he knows she esteemed him more than she ever esteemed any man, and that she cannot form so despicable an opinion of him as to suppose that he can regard her with no eyes except those of a lover. Having thus said "nothing that he ought to say and everything he oughtn't to," he was, it is scarcely surprising to add, summarily rejected: at least it is supposed so. Nor can there be any doubt that he was intensely astonished.

This, however, was not the only, or the first, attempt he made to fill Mary Wollstonecraft's place. A year earlier, in 1798, between the publication of *The Enquirer* and that of *St Leon*, he had paid his addresses (if such a phrase can be used when there was so singular a want of address) to another person once of repute, now much forgotten—Miss Harriet Lee, joint author with her sister Sophia of divers novels and tales. How absolutely impossible a person (in a sense of the word in which French has anticipated English) Godwin was may almost sufficiently be judged from the fact that

after he had first met Miss Lee at Bath he set to work when he got back to London "to make elaborate analyses of her conversation." Having satisfied himself that she would suit him by the process of elaborate analysis of her conversation (let it be remembered that Miss Lee, though a woman of letters, was not in the least of advanced or unconventional ideas in any respect), he suggested that she should come and stay in his house as that of a person who "did justice to her merits." Not unnaturally she sent him no answer; and after puzzling himself as to what this silence could possibly mean, he wrote to say that he was "obliged to be in Bristol next week," and would come and see her. The lady, who seems to have been a prude with a dash of the coquette and more than a dash of pride, was offended at his exceedingly *naïf* avowal that he was not coming on purpose; but agreed to see him. Her difficulties in accepting him were chiefly religious, and in any such case Godwin's chance was quite hopeless, inasmuch as he was both far too honest a man to conceal his opinions, and far too clumsy a one to put them in any way that could fail to be offensive to a sincere believer. He lectured her by letter, in a popular and condescending manner, on the points at issue, very much as he might have done if it had happened that she preferred Tweedledum and he Tweedledee; and at last received from her a plain statement (which even then did not take the scales from his eyes) that the difference between them was not in her eyes a matter of theory, and that she would have nothing more to say to him. In fact, Godwin might have been described by Dr Johnson (whom, naturally enough, he did not like) as an unsnubbable person. It is recorded that on one occasion, when his friend and constant helper, Thomas Wedgwood, had told him frankly that their

friendship was safer if they did not meet, Godwin replied by suggesting that they *should* meet to "discuss the question whether it was better that they should meet or not"!

When a man has made up his mind in this way, to marry, no matter whom, for better, for worse, it nearly always happens that he does so for worse. And so it happened to Godwin, though not quite as much for worse as, perhaps, he deserved. A widow of the name of Clairmont took a house next to his in the North of London; and, though it was not Leap Year, addressed him one evening as they sat on their contiguous balconies: "Is it possible that I behold the immortal Godwin?" She is admitted—it is one of the few good things said about her—to have been handsome, and not a fool; the immortal Godwin was always to be caught by flattery, and they very shortly married, the bride adding her own two children to the curiously assorted Godwin nursery; proceeding to comport herself after the fashion which made Lamb nickname her "The Bad Baby"; but, in business respects especially, perhaps giving Godwin as good a wife as he deserved.

The marriage took place just inside the nineteenth century, and Godwin lived till 1836. A great deal could be said (very easily, too, by the present writer) about this later part of his life, which saw many of the events connecting him most closely with general knowledge. He always worked hard; but his work was now almost purely literary in character, interesting, too, in its kinds, and perhaps not quite sufficiently valued, but out of our main subject. It was in this time that the events which gave his family affairs a notoriety of no very pleasant character—the suicide of Fanny Imlay and the elopements of Mary Godwin and Claire (less

prettily but more accurately Jane) Clairmont—took place. In the last years of it occurred one of the least unpleasant ironies of Fate, the appointment by the Reformers of 1832 of this ancient anarchist to a sinecure office, the Yeoman Ushership of the Exchequer. I have sometimes thought that it would be amusing to print a collection of title-pages of famous books adjusted to the history and characters of their authors. "Political Justice, by the Yeoman Usher of the Exchequer," would not be the least piquant of these. But it was also during this later half of his life that a feature of our New Philosopher developed itself which may be fairly connected with his earlier opinions—which, indeed, has been definitely and elaborately excused by reference to these opinions. Godwin, to put it plumply, became, whatever he may have been earlier, the most shameless spunger on record—the most shameless, that is to say, of the grave and serious kind as opposed to the lighter methods and attitude of that contemporary and friend of his whom men call "Leigh Hunt" and gods "Skimpole." Everybody knows the fashion in which he bled Shelley. But perhaps everybody does not know that he borrowed money from poor men like Ritson and did not repay it; that the very next morning after he had been introduced to young Talfourd, he called upon that sucking and luckily quite impecunious barrister to request a loan of £150; or that after Sir Walter's misfortune, and when he was, as every man of letters in England knew, working himself to death to pay off his own debts and other people's, Godwin pestered him for what was practically a guarantee of money. "Oh! but," say his defenders, "he did not accept ordinary conventions of conduct." One may certainly thank them for that word, and, if such are the fruits, form a very decided

opinion as to the tree. No doubt the original New Philosophy might justify an attempt to make someone else exert benevolence and acquire merit thereby; but, as in the other cases noticed earlier in this article, the logical developments of the proceeding would be inconvenient. It would not take long for housebreaking and highway robbery to result from this principle, just as murder and outrage naturally develop from the others.

That, as he grew older, Godwin grew in some respects wiser—not merely in the way of becoming, without the slightest regard to correlative merit, a sinecurist under Government, though he had previously held that everybody ought to work and that there ought to be no Government at all—is not surprising. The children (or indeed the parents) of Revolution generally grow wiser unless their offspring or parent devours them too soon. But he has also left very amusing letters to intending disciples who took *Political Justice* at the foot of its letter. And his last philosophical work, the *Thoughts on Man*, of 1831, would certainly not of itself suggest identity of authorship with his first. But this again is common, and, except to those who care only for the anecdotage of literature and history, adds nothing to the interest of *Political Justice* itself. That interest lies in the fact that the book is the first book in English, and one of the first books in any language, to advocate complete reversal, or at any rate removal, of all hitherto accepted principles of law in politics, religion, morals and everything that affects the *conduct* of men. The author's history and personality add a little to the interest of the book and supply comment, sometimes decidedly ironic, on its principles; nor is this addition, perhaps, quite accidental or uninstructive.

But it is as an early gospeller of what in various modifications or developments has since been known as Anarchism, Nihilism, Communism (in the *Commune* sense), and finally Bolshevism, that Godwin most deserves attention and will best "repay perusal."

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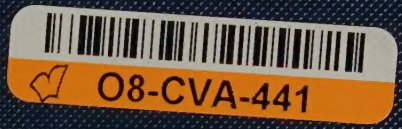
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